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ABSTRACT

Although Zimbabwe has shown a strong commitment to improving educational access and quality, overall enrollment figures conceal major regional disparities and the lack of education and services in marginalized communities. One neglected sector of the population is the commercial farmworker community, currently comprising about two million hired farmworkers and their families. The limited information about schooling on commercial farms, particularly the lack of clarity about the relevance and quality of education, prompted Save the Children Fund (SCF) to undertake a participatory research project on 27 farms in Mashonaland Central in late 1998. Over 2,000 children took part in a participatory rural appraisal (PRA), with 1,072 children aged 12-16 participating in discussions and exercises. Results were followed up in focus group discussions with students, teachers, and parents on three farms. This publication consists of six main sections. Sections 1 and 2 present an overview of commercial farms in Zimbabwe and their schools; the social, political, and economic conditions in which farmworkers live; and the rationale and methodology of participatory research. Section 3 focuses on the children's findings and the reasons they either do not go to school or drop out. Section 4 explores parents' and teachers' viewpoints and differences in attitudes among parents, teachers, and students. Sections 5 and 6 detail the issues of quality of education and relevance of the curriculum and present interviews with a headmaster, a health worker, a farmer's wife, and an SCF project officer. Recommendations are offered to the government and nongovernmental organizations. An appendix details PRA methodology. (Contains 17 references.) (SV)

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We learn with hope

Issues in education on commercial farms in Zimbabwe

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'We learn with hope'

Issues in education on commercial farms in Zimbabwe

Save the Children

This publication is largely based on a programme of research carried out with children, parents and teachers on a selection of farms in Mashonaland Central Province, Zimbabwe in 1999. The principle research co-ordinators were Josephine Mutandiro, Irene Mutumbwa and Andrew Muringaniza from the SCF farm work programme and Mary Khozombah. Writing and editing were jointly carried out by Di Auret, Chris McIvor and Tisa Chifunyise of SCF and Irene McCartney of Weaver Press.

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'We learn with hope'

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Acronyms

ALB – Agriculture Labour Bureau

CFU – Commercial Farmer's Union

CIIR – Catholic Institute for International Relations

FEWS – Family Early Warning System

GOZ – Government of Zimbabwe

SCF – Save the Children Fund

UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund

UZ – University of Zimbabwe

Introduction

Some ten years ago at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtein, Thailand, many of the world's governments committed themselves to achieving universal access to good quality primary education by the year 2000 and an end to gender inequality in school enrolment figures. While progress has been made in some parts of the world, it is clear that these targets were wildly unrealistic. Today it is estimated that some 125 million children of primary school age are receiving no education at all. Most of them are girls. Within the first four years of primary school, another 150 million children drop out.[1]

The situation is most worrying in sub-Saharan Africa, where one recent report painted the following bleak picture:

> *The full extent of the threat now facing sub-Saharan Africa is not widely appreciated. Since the 1990 Jomtien conference, a group of 16 countries in the region, accounting for half of all 6 - 11 year olds, have suffered a decline in net enrolment rates. In the absence of a dramatically improved level of education coverage, the foundations of sub-Saharan Africa's recovery in the next century will be non-existent, and the region will become increasingly marginalized.*[2]

Faced with these statistics many governments have recommitted themselves to achieving the targets they set in 1990. The time scale, however, has now shifted to 2015 when the aim is to achieve universal primary education.[3]

Yet in many countries achieving quantitative targets in school enrolment is only one of the challenges. While improved access to education for disadvantaged children such as those with disabilities, or from poor families, of ethnic minorities, in institutions, orphans, working children, girls, etc. is a welcome objective, there are major questions to be asked about what happens to these children once they are in school. The latter is, after all, only a set of buildings. What marks it out as an educational establishment are the benefits derived from attendance. If the school experience is not useful, then can we really claim that, even with one hundred per cent enrolment, children are receiving education?

In other words, the objectives set at Jomtien will not be achieved solely by building more schools and employing more teachers. The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the issue of educational quality is as important as educational access. Article 29, for example, makes the point that education should be directed at developing the child's personality and full potential, preparing them for active life as an adult and fostering respect for human rights, cultural values, the traditions and beliefs of others.

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1 *Education Now*, Oxfam International, Oxford, 1999

2 Ibid, p. 12.

3 This goal was endorsed at the Social Development Summit in 1995.

Yet as we know, many schools in many parts of the world significantly fail to realize these objectives. If teachers have upwards of 60 to 70 children in a class and, as is frequently the case, are unqualified and untrained, how can quality education be guaranteed? Such classes, as teachers themselves acknowledge, largely become an exercise in crowd control with an undue emphasis on punishment as a means of maintaining order. In one class that our education advisor in Zimbabwe observed, the principal objective of the lesson seemed to be to maintain silence for as long as possible. How can slow learners or potential high achievers in a class of this nature be said to derive any benefit from attending school?

Critical questions also need to be asked about the curriculum and teaching methodologies. The principles of active participation and the stimulation of creativity and imagination cannot be encouraged in a system where rote learning and slavish obedience to the teachers' opinions are often the values that are most rewarded. And if the many children who fail to pass formal exams in academic subjects cannot see a link between education and the world of work outside the classroom, how can such a system claim to prepare children for the adult life that awaits them?

Education in Zimbabwe

While Zimbabwe manifests several of the problems that beset school systems in other parts of the world, it has displayed a level of commitment towards educational provision that has gained widespread commendation. Investment in school spending in the years following independence in 1980 saw a rise in total primary and secondary school enrolment from 890,000 to some three million students within ten years. The transition rate from the top of the primary school to the first years of secondary school rose from 28 per cent to 60 per cent during the same period.

In 1980 Zimbabwe had fewer than 200 secondary schools. By 1989 this had risen to more than 1,500. Complimenting Zimbabwe on its innovative approach to educational reform in the post-independence period, one report described its attempts at dealing with the issue of teacher efficiency:

> *Governments have developed a wide range of strategies for improving teacher efficiency. In the early 1980s, Zimbabwe addressed these problems through a series of reforms. Double-shift teaching was introduced to reduce over-crowding in classrooms. Low-cost, teacher-training methods were developed to minimize the time teachers spent in training colleges, and to maximize the time they spent in classrooms. Extensive use was made of teacher assistants.*[4]

Yet Zimbabwe's impressive statistics conceal several problems that have compromised its commitment to 'Quality Education for All'. The overall figures for enrolment conceal major regional disparities, where communities marginalized by poverty, ethnic status, geography and political neglect have failed to enjoy the same educational benefits delivered to other parts of the country.

One neglected sector of the population is the commercial farmworker community, who currently number some two million workers and their families. Both before and after independence, this community has remained marginalized in terms of social service provision. As a result it has manifested some of the worst health, education, housing, sanitation and nutrition statistics in the country. Whereas many farm owners believed that government should be responsible for provision of such services, the latter, in turn, felt that employers should play a major role in improving the working and living conditions of their employees. The result of this impasse has been years of neglect. In consequence, the farmworking community has lacked the skills and much of the self-confidence and initiative necessary to promote their own development.

Save the Children Fund (UK) has supported initiatives on commercial farms for workers and their families over the last two decades.

4 Ibid, p. 76

Concentrated mainly in Mashonaland Central, the farmworker programme has included support to pre-schools, health interventions, housing construction, sanitation provision and community development. Yet despite the considerable expertise and knowledge derived from our work in these sectors, and the identification of a set of practical skills which would be of considerable value to children from these communities, the programme has never systematically involved itself with the issue of schooling.

It was partly in response to our awareness that we had missed an opportunity to help promote quality education, and partly as a result of what many farm children were telling us about the infringement of their rights, that in 1999 SCF Zimbabwe decided to investigate a possible intervention in this area. It was clear that there were major gaps in information as to the extent and nature of educational deprivation within these communities. What was lacking in particular was a qualitative analysis of education on farms, one which did not only look at issues of access and availability but also at problems of quality and relevance within the existing farm schools. We thus undertook research in order to better understand the nature of the problems.

Identifying the problem

One of the main challenges in development is identifying the true nature of the problem to be dealt with. The history of non-governmental organization (NGO) activity is littered with numerous examples of failed projects, often due to the fact that the issue has not been adequately understood. Part of this misunderstanding often arises from the professional bias of those who design projects, the supposition by expatriate and local 'experts' that they automatically know what is in the best interests of targeted communities.

Fortunately, and as a result of extensive failure, development practitioners have been somewhat more humble in recent years and now seek to consult project beneficiaries before embarking on any intervention. While much of what passes for consultation and participation is often tokenistic and flawed, at its best the genuine involvement of communities in the analysis, identification and specification of solutions to problems has produced higher quality projects in recent years. At the same time, giving communities a chance to participate enhances their confidence and ability to deal with other aspects of their own development. When projects are designed, run and managed without them, this perpetuates a culture of dependency.

Interventions in the area of education reveal the same dynamics as those mentioned above. Indeed because education is perceived to be even more of an issue where professionals (teachers, headmasters, Ministry of Education officials) know best, and where communities with high rates of illiteracy and a lack of previous access to schooling know least, the involvement of the latter in project design, implementation and monitoring has been even more problematic.

In many parts of the world, schools are set up, managed, controlled and evaluated by professionals from outside the communities in which they exist. Where local participation does take place it is generally in terms of raising funds for a school roof or extra furniture. The involvement of parents in specifying the nature of what their children should learn, and how subjects should be taught, would seem heretical to most headmasters and teachers, who often see such an input as an infringement on their professionalism. As a recent SCF publication on education points out,

> *Evidence from many countries shows that children's learning is critically affected by the relationships between the adults who represent "home" and the teachers who dominate children's school experience. But teachers do not necessarily see any need to involve parents in what goes on at school and may actually be arrogant towards those whom they consider to be uneducated.*[5]

5 *A Chance in Life*, SCF, Harare, 1998, p.42

As a result of the unwillingness to consult both parents and children when defining educational problems and devising solutions, there is a high risk of misunderstanding the nature of a particular issue. Teachers will often see things differently from those who they are supposed to be helping. This was clearly exemplified in the research that SCF undertook on commercial farms. Many teachers, for example, complained that low school enrolment, the unwillingness of parents to pay fees, their lack of interest in raising funds for the school were due to community ignorance. The fact that most adults in these locations had not received any previous schooling was seen by many teachers as a central to the problem, since 'they are not educated enough to appreciate the value of what we do'.

Yet consultations with parents pointed to a more complex interpretation. Some families do not send their children to school because the quality and value of what their children derive from such an experience does not appear to benefit them directly. It was also suggested on many occasions that teachers saw themselves as superior and looked down upon the parents. Such a perception can only contribute to the gap in understanding between the two groups and make discussion even harder to achieve. No more so as when there are instances of abuse, be it sexual abuse or the more regular beatings. And while many parents commended the commitment of teachers to the welfare of their children, instances of abuse seemed sufficiently common to validate their concern. High levels of teacher absenteeism were also mentioned, which means that classes are left unattended or supervised by someone who does not have time to offer any useful education.

Thus from the point of view of some parents, six or seven years of schooling representing a major economic sacrifice for many families, does not provide children with a set of skills that will enhance their work prospects, while secondary school remains an unobtainable goal for the great majority of farmworkers' children. Although the reasons for this are primarily financial, the children often understand more clearly than their parents that the employment market is now so competitive that little can be achieved without a secondary education. However it is imperative to note that another major obstacle to secondary education is the lack of birth certificates, a necessary educational requirement.Unless there is a major certification exercise done on the commercial farms, farmworkers confront so many practical difficulties in obtaining these certificates, that this is a problem that will not be overcome.

The majority of these problems simply cannot be overcome by the teachers, or the teachers alone. An effort needs to be made by all parties concerned with the welfare and education of children on farms. The point is that without accessing the views of all stakeholders involved in education, including those of the intended beneficiaries, the definition of the problem will be biased and incomplete. While teachers, headmasters and educational planners all advocate the construction of more schools on commercial farms so as to facilitate improved access, children and parents also caution us to remember that the school experience needs to be both qualitative and relevant to their needs if it is to merit such an expense. For as one parent said,

> *The education our children receive is not relevant because after grade four they have nowhere to go. Tell me where you can go with your grade four education? Nowhere, except to follow in your father and mother's footsteps in the farmer's fields.*

Participation in research

Identifying educational priorities within targeted communities, and incorporating the views of children, invariably takes time if the exercise is not to be tokenistic. Methods need to be developed so as to encourage the active participation of people, unaccustomed to having their views considered. Indeed many children and their parents involved in the SCF study expressed their surprise and support for a process which recognized the value of their inputs.

As part of the methodology chosen, the research team also trained children in a select number of farm schools to gather and analyse data from

their peers and parents. While this turned out to be an exercise requiring more time and support than originally envisaged, it was felt to be one of the most positive aspects of the study. This was not just because of the quality and extent of the information gathered but because the actual process of supporting children to carry out research themselves was perceived to be valuable in its own right.

According to many of the children who participated, this was a display of confidence in their abilities that they had rarely witnessed, either at school or at home. In terms of identifying appropriate teaching methodologies and improved curriculum content, their observations provided us with an important indication of positive learning methodologies. The unfortunate fact is that many qualified teachers view the commercial farm worker population as culturally backward and ignorant. This attitude can carry over into teaching practice and indeed many of the children complained that what most disillusioned them about school was the dismissive behaviour displayed towards them by their teachers.

Provided, however, with the opportunity to display their abilities, children will often perform beyond adult expectations. Parents, teachers, and adult research co-ordinators noticed a positive growth in the self-esteem and confidence of the children who carried out the research. At the same time it allowed the children to develop a range of skills in writing, drawing, communication, listening and analysis that had rarely been achieved within the formal system. If education practitioners would allow children the opportunity to develop their talents through active learning, then the under-achievement among students that teachers in farm communities bitterly complain about would probably be reversed.

Contents

The publication consists of six sections. The first presents a general overview of commercial farms in Zimbabwe and the social, political and economic conditions in which farm workers live. The second section provides a more detailed background on the rationale for looking at education on farms, and the approaches adopted by the research team to identify the gaps in quantitative and qualitative information.

Section 3 focuses on the children's findings, and explains in some detail the reasons why many of them either do not go to school or prematurely drop out. High costs of schooling (related to levies, books, uniforms and other expenses), inadequate facilities, cultural resistance to education, family hindrances, orphanhood, gender issues, peer pressure, child labour, the poor quality of education, abuse by teachers etc. are all identified, and explained through interviews and drawings.

Section 4 explores educational issues from the standpoint of parents and teachers. While there is some consensus on a number of points, the fact is that children, the community, and teaching professionals see many issues in education somewhat differently. If a more responsive education system is to be developed on commercial farms, much more needs to be done to bring these different viewpoints together through the creation of a forum where opinions can be openly discussed. Although the School Development Association (SDA) is the potential forum where this should take place, our research revealed that SDAs were almost non-existent on farms or functioned at a tokenistic level if they had been established.

Section 5 deals in more detail with the issues of quality of education and relevance of the curriculum. This chapter was more demanding in terms of gathering information and provoking suggestions for improvements. As parents pointed out, it is an issue about which they have rarely, if ever, been consulted. Their dis-illusionment with the system has usually been expressed by withdrawing their children from school, rather than seeking a mechanism to influence practice and change education into something which more adequately meets their needs.

Section 6 simply provides four more substantial interviews so that readers can themselves appreciate the nuances of viewpoint represented by a headmaster, a health worker, a farmer's wife, and an SCF project officer.

The conclusion and recommendations are meant to provoke debate and discussion. There can be no universal blueprint for change. What works in one community cannot be mechanically translated to another, where different issues and problems predominate. The principle of decentralization, to which the Zimbabwe Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture has now subscribed, demands that local community involvement in schools must be a precondition for sustainable improvement. This counsels against blanket solutions imposed from outside.

This publication is aimed at a variety of audiences. For NGOs and government institutions specifically involved with education, we hope that '*We learn with hope*' will help to place this neglected community on the national agenda. We also hope that the concerns expressed by children and adults around issues of relevance and quality in schools will be discussed and will assume more of a profile in educational planning than they have done in the past.

For organizations specifically involved with children and the realization of child rights, we believe that the information on the history of the project will offer some guidelines as to how participatory research with children can be carried out elsewhere. Finally we hope that this publication will be of interest to a wider audience than the educational professionals and development planners mentioned above. The problems affecting farm communities have largely remained hidden from public attention. By giving children a voice we hope that a more enabling environment for them can be created, within which their rights to education, health, protection and welfare can be more adequately realized.

Chris McIvor
Director
SCF (Zimbabwe)

Section 1

Background to the commercial farms in Zimbabwe: their agro-economic significance

There are approximately 4,600 large scale commercial farms in Zimbabwe, occupying 33 per cent of the land. Two million permanent and seasonal farmworkers and their families live and work on these farms of whom just under a million (46 per cent) reside in four provinces: Mashonaland Central, West, and East where large hectarages of land are devoted to tobacco, grains and horticulture – all labour intensive crops; and Manicaland with its tea and coffee plantations as well as forestry estates.

Zimbabwe's agricultural sector's contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ranges between 15 and 20 per cent. Sixty per cent of its local manufacturing industries are dependent on the commercial farms for their raw materials or provide markets for the agricultural outputs. In 1998 the export of tobacco, horticultural products, cotton lint, sugar, beef, coffee, paprika, tea, ostrich, dairy and poultry products and groundnuts (in descending order of importance) amounted to Z$16 billion, which represented approximately 40 per cent of total export earnings. These figures give us an indication of the significance of commercial agriculture within the country's economy.

Courtesy of the Zimbabwe Tobacco Association

Employment in agriculture

The agricultural sector is the largest employer in the country accounting for 27 per cent of total formal employment.[1] A survey carried out in 1997 on 1,936 commercial farms (43 per cent) revealed that 69 per cent of farms employed between 21 and 50 workers; 29 per cent between 51 and 100 workers. The majority (86.4 per cent) of permanent farmworkers were male, while females made up 13.6 per cent of the workforce.

Seasonal employees constituted 40 per cent of the total workforce, with females providing 55.8 per cent of the labour and males 44.2 per cent.[2]

The number of children living on the commercial farms ranges between 400,017 and 459,229. Approximately 36 per cent of children are between six and twelve years old, while 29 per cent are over twelve.[3]

Child labour was common on farms before independence in 1980, and it still occurs on many farms especially among young people who have left primary school and do not have access to secondary education.

Service provision on the commercial farms

In spite of the relative economic importance of commercial farms and the two million farmworkers and their families, service provision to this large sector of people has always been poor. Following the Rural Councils Act of 1966, the provision of health and educational services to agricultural workers was a primary function of the rural councils. Unfortunately, however, councils had limited financial resources, being dependent upon government grants for their running costs, and farm rates and vehicle taxes for development. The latter were used primarily for road construction, leaving little for the construction of needed schools and clinics. Of importance is the consideration that the Rural Councils had the power to introduce a health and education levy on farmers, but did not do so. This was perhaps because most of the councillors were farmers.

In 1974 in 30 rural council areas, there were a total of 37 static and 24 mobile clinics, the bulk of these services being in Mashonaland Central where there were 26 static and twelve mobile clinics.[4] Given that there were approximately 1,328,000 people living on commercial farms in 1976, (i.e. 332,000 labourers[5] with an average family size of six) overall access to a clinic at this time would have been 1:32,655. This compares favourably with access in the communal areas that ranged from 1: 38-42,000.[6]

As, however, there were no resident doctors at the rural council clinics during the 1970s, access to a doctor for the farmworker was the same as the national figure i.e. 1:100,000 for the rural areas.

The absence of any static health facility within easy reach of people living in the commercial farming areas, exacerbated by the almost total lack of public transport, meant (and still means) that workers were very dependent upon their employers for any access to such social services.

There were few primary schools on the commercial farms prior to 1980. Although the rural councils had the power to establish them and the non-government schools' regulations of 1959, enabled the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture to establish and supervise primary schools on commercial farms, very little was done to provide education for farmworkers' children.[7] Where there were farm schools, they were generally unaided and staffed by unqualified teachers – one reason being that the

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1 Employees at 30. 9.94, totalled 310,944, with approximately 164,748 permanent employees in that year, increasing to 186,000 in 1996. ALB 1994, CFU, 1998

2 It should be noted that the significant gender difference between permanent and seasonal labour, has serious implications for work security and benefits for the female workforce.

3 USAID/FEWS, 1998

4 Clarke, 1976, pp. 109-110

5 Riddel, 1980, p. 7

6 Clarke, 1976, pp. 116-118

7 In 1962 there were 112 registered (aided) or licensed farm schools.

government grant for teachers' salaries was only half that paid to schools in other rural areas. In 1975, 12,950 children on farms attended unaided or unregistered schools while the overall number attending school prior to 1980 never exceeded 30,000.

After independence in 1980 the new government's intention to provide access to health and education for all by the year 2000, did not include commercial farmworkers. No rural health centres were established within the commercial farming areas, nor were any new clinics, hospitals or schools.

On the other hand by 1985, as a result of the government's investment in social services in the communal areas, there were seven times the number of static clinics in the district council (i.e. communal) areas as there were in rural council (i.e. commercial farming) areas, and yet the district council clinics served only one third of the number of patients. Similarly schools in the rural council areas had ten times the number of pupils per primary school than those in the district council areas.[8] The government argued that it could not build clinics and schools on commercial farms for the benefit of the farmworkers, as the farms were privately owned. The farmers stated that their taxes entitled them and their workers to public schools and health facilities. As a result of this impasse little was done to improve access to service provision in the 1980s.

However the situation improved considerably during the 1990s with increased awareness among farmers and workers of the need to improve living and working conditions on the farms, not least because the repatriation of large numbers of Mozambican farm labourers resulted in labour shortages.

The Agricultural Workers Welfare Plan (1997), devised by The Agricultural Labour Bureau, embodies a commitment by members of the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) to the improvement of housing, access to water and sanitation, primary health care services and access (within ten kilometres) to a registered primary school, before the year 2007.

Improvements in the living conditions of farmworkers in Mashonaland Central have also taken place since 1992, in a process facilitated by Save the Children Fund's Farmworker Programme (FWP) It was through this programme that 462 pre-schools, for example, were established on farms by December 1998.

Photographer: Kerstin Hacker

Children watering the vegetables in the nutrition garden which provides the relish for their mid-day meal.

[8] Loewenson, 1985

The socio-political situation of farmworkers

Although, on many farms the situation has improved over the last ten years, historically the peculiar cultural composition of the farm village has been characterized by the lack of a strong group or community feeling. Moreover in addition to poor social service provision, farmworkers were marginalized (and many still are) in other respects:

- Before 1998, they were disenfranchised i.e. they had no right to participate in decision-making in the areas in which they lived.
- Although they now have the right to vote in rural district council elections, they are, for the most part, unaware of this and do not register to vote.
- Only over the last five years have developmental structures such as the Village and Ward Development Committees (VIDCOs and WADCOs), been established on commercial farms.[9] Farmworkers on farms without development committees are still isolated from the political processes that the rest of the country enjoys.
- Farm villages exhibit loose social cohesion as they have relatively transient populations and are multi-ethnic in nature. Prior to 1980, the majority of farmworkers originated from Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique. Most farms still have 20 to 40 per cent of 'foreign' workers, although many are now third generation, naturalized, Zimbabweans.
- The villages are often multi-lingual: Shona being the main language spoken, while Chewa is still used by older people, and the youth sometimes prefer to speak English. Communication with the farmer, once predominantly in Chilapalapa, is increasingly in Shona.
- Farmworkers, particularly those whose families originated outside Zimbabwe, sometimes lack a clear sense of identity, as a result of the difficulties they experience in trying to obtain Zimbabwean citizenship, identity documents and birth certificates for their children. These factors are compounded when one or both parents are not literate.
- Farm villages are often closed and isolated communities. This means that specific cultural practices can be upheld, especially in relation to families of Malawian origin. As a result a sub-culture has developed on commercial farms in the Mashonaland and Manicaland areas.
- Economic insecurity is a significant factor in the lives of most workers. Among permanent workers such insecurity can lead to increased polygamy, with their wives working full-time in the fields or sheds. Among seasonal workers, the majority of whom are young women, it can encourage prostitution. Both these patterns have a negative effect on child care.
- Illiteracy is also a problem in most farm communities, as a consequence of the limited educational background of most workers.
- Other difficulties for many farmworker communities, include overcrowding, and limited access to facilities such as household sanitation and water points – the latter adding to the women's domestic burden.
- Lack of ease of access to health and education facilities on some farms is perhaps the gravest issue for children, who without adequate or appropriate schooling cannot look forward to any form of alternative employment or alternative life as an adult.

Post-independence access to education

In the first four years of independence, primary enrolment figures throughout the country increased by more than 100 per cent, and secondary education by more than 10 per cent on pre-independence enrolment figures.

[9] For example, at the time of writing, 463 such committees are active in Mashonaland Central.

Children at school

Enrolment figures of primary school children show an increase from 400,000 in 1978 to 1,100,000, while secondary school enrolment rose from under 100,000 to 250,000 during the same period.[10] It did not, however, increase in the commercial farming areas, as few additional schools were constructed, and these were for the most part small, unregistered schools, built by the farmers.

This rapid expansion of educational provision was made at considerable cost in the quality of the provision. Namely:

- a high pupil teacher ratio.
- hot-seating.
- the employment of untrained teachers.
- limited availability of teaching and learning materials.

All of which amounted to a decline in the quality of education.[11]

In 1999 UNICEF[12] recorded an overall net primary school intake in Zimbabwe, of 91 per cent for boys and 90 per cent for girls, during the period 1993-97. However only 76 per cent of both boys and girls reached grade five between 1990 and 1995. A study in 1998 confirmed that the average years of study per school drop-out in government and urban primary schools is five years, compared with less than three years in rural and non-government schools.[13]

Forty-seven per cent of Zimbabwe's total population is fifteen years old or younger. Of the two million people who live on commercial farms, a million are estimated to be children. An accurate picture of access to primary education on commercial farms is, however, difficult to obtain as there is a dearth of information on formal education in this sector. According to one report,[14] 52 per cent of children on commercial farms have never been to school. The percentage of those not attending school, according to grades, were: grades one to six – 26 per cent; grade seven – 16 per cent. These statistics reflect data derived from registered schools only.

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[10] Zimbabwe Report on the United Nations Decade for Women: Community Development and Women's Affairs with UNICEF assistance, 1985

[11] UNICEF, 1994

[12] UNICEF, State of the World's Children, Table Four, 1999

[13] Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, July 1998

[14] Department of Social Welfare, 1997

Research carried out in 1998, recorded a total of 606 primary schools on commercial farms, representing 15 per cent of farms. Of these 252 schools (42 per cent) were registered, while the remainder were privately owned and funded by the farmer. The total number of children attending primary school on these commercial farms was computed to lie between 146,000 and 167,000. When these figures were measured against the number of children between the ages of six and twelve, resident on the farms, primary school attendance was almost 100 per cent, with a mean number per farm of 44.[15] This appears to be a very high figure given that the same research recorded 11 per cent of commercial farms with no primary school within ten kilometres of the farm. On the other hand SCF research undertaken in 1998, suggests that this skewed picture could have arisen because many farm schools adjacent to communal areas are attended by children from these areas, with the consent of the farmers. This could have inflated the actual percentage of farm children attending primary school. On the other hand it is possible that the USAID/FEWS figures reflect the fact that on some farms the questionnaires were filled out by farm clerks, who may well have over-estimated the numbers of children attending school.

In 1994 one report[16] showed secondary school attendance on commercial farms, for the thirteen to seventeen year age group, as 7 per cent, while a 1998 study recorded between 34,210 and 43,833 children at secondary school (3 per cent), with a mean number per farm of eleven. The very low attendance at secondary school reflects the proportionally high cost of schooling and the lack of secondary schools in the commercial farming areas. The mean distance to a government secondary school is fourteen kilometres[17] from the farm village. As a result, large numbers of children over the age of thirteen, who live on commercial farms are neither at primary nor secondary school.

[15] USAID/FEWS, 1998

[16] Department of Social Welfare, 1997

[17] USAID/FEWS, 1998

Section 2

Children and education on commercial farms: a brief background outlining the involvement of Save the Children Fund (SCF)

'Each person has the right to education and cultural life'.[1]

I want to live.

I want to eat.

I want to learn.

I want shelter.

I am also a person.

I don't want to cry

Or to be hungry.

I don't want to be cold

Or to live outside.

I don't want to be left out of school.

In the past, human rights were believed to encompass children's rights, that is until Save the Children Fund drafted the first Charter of the Rights of the Child in 1923. This formed the basis for the development of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which was adopted unanimously by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly on 20 November 1989.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child encompasses 54 separate articles, defining different rights and mechanisms for monitoring and implementation. However the Convention makes it clear that access to education is, in itself, not enough. The quality of the educational experience is critical. The kind of educational experience that nurtures the child's overall development as a human being is also the kind that will give them a better chance in life, and ensure that they contribute to the well-being of society. If schools are oppressive, boring or neglectful places, neither the children nor society is improved by children being there. But if they fulfil their potential, they can be powerful agents for good.[2]

Save the Children Fund's Mission Statement declares, 'In a world which continues to deny children their basic human rights, we champion the rights of all children to a happy, healthy and secure childhood.[3] In order to try and achieve this objective SCF believes four questions are fundamental to the interpretation

[1] Article 17: The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

[2] Ogadoh and Molteno, 1998

[3] Save the Children Fund (UK), Mission Statement, 1997

of all other rights. These are:

- ❖ How can we ensure and safeguard the best interests of the child?
- ❖ How can we ensure that children survive in an environment in which they can develop freely?
- ❖ How can we ensure that children of both sexes are not subjected to discrimination?
- ❖ How can we ensure that they participate in programmes which effect them?

Thus over the last decade, SCF's programme in Zimbabwe, has attempted to highlight the educational difficulties faced by children on commercial farms. In 1996 the organization prioritized its concerns about:

- the high drop-out rate of farmworker's children from primary schools.
- the large number of children on farms who do not have birth certificates, which excludes them from secondary school.
- the children's limited access to secondary education.

Save the Children Fund urged government to find a way to bring together all the stakeholders, to resolve this situation through joint planning and the mutually agreed responsibility for the provision of buildings, teachers' salaries, furniture and educational materials.[4]

Not a great deal has, however, changed over the last few years. Stakeholders still need to work together and find a way to facilitate long-term developmental projects that will make a reality of children's human rights while recognizing the role that children can play as the subjects rather than the objects of developmental interventions.

Of key importance to the realization of these rights is the discovery of how children perceive:

- their needs and rights, such as their right to education.
- relevance – in terms of the curriculum, the range and way in which subjects are taught, and their future.
- their ideas about how to achieve their objectives.

The participatory approach: the SCF study

The limited availability of general information with regard to schooling on commercial farms, and more particularly a lack of clarity about the relevance, nature and quality of the education, prompted SCF to undertake a participatory research project in Mashonaland Central in late-1998, the results of which were followed up in focus group discussions mid-1999.

In order to make sure that the children's ideas and experiences were heard at first hand, SCF chose the participatory method of data collection. This method enables adults to interact with children while older children facilitate and assist in information gathering. Such an approach provides a more accurate insight into the lives and concerns of children while simultaneously empowering them with new awareness.

Background and methodology

The study focused on 27 farms, three from each district in the province. They were identified on the basis of the following specific criteria, to ensure that the research sample included farms representative of a variety of differing positions:

- access to educational facilities, including presence and absence of same.
- proximity or otherwise to commercial centres.
- small- and large-scale farming operations, and relative size of village populations.
- presence or absence of casual labour, with consequent numbers of female headed households.

[4] SCF letter to Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, July 1996

- farms engaged in varying agricultural activities.
- degree of homogeneity within the community, ensuring the inclusion of the two extremes.

These criteria enabled the study to include children from a wide range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. This made it possible to highlight those issues which prevent children from attending school, other than straightforward ease of access .

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methodology

The research itself was carried out using the PRA methodology,[5] which is well suited for use with children. Two thousand children of all ages were involved in the process, with 1,072 children between twelve and sixteen years of age participating in discussions and exercises. The process itself was divided into three stages.

The first consisted of the use of PRA by adults with children. During this stage, youngsters, able and confident enough to conduct such exercises with their peers, were identified and subsequently invited to become co-researchers in the study. Care was taken to observe cultural sensitivities and norms. Where necessary, some PRA sessions were held in groups of all female/ all male children. A number of individual interviews were also held with disabled and orphaned children to allow for the more detailed probing that is not possible in a group.

The second stage involved training eighteen youths to collect information from their peers using PRA methods. These young people then spent several weeks in their own villages, working with children from twelve to sixteen years of age. Particular issues raised by children, which related specifically to their parents and teachers, subsequently formed the basis of the third stage. This involved obtaining the adults responses to these issues.

These three different approaches allowed us to cross check all the information that was collected.

(Precise details of methodology and practise of PRA and its use in this particular research project can be referred to in Appendix 1.)

Follow-up on the PRA research

It was considered that some of the issues raised by the children could usefully be discussed further and that, in addition, it would be valuable to have the opinions of parents and teachers. Thus focus-group discussions were held on three commercial farms: one with a registered school drawing 541 pupils from seven farms within a nine kilometre radius; fourteen teachers (including two student teachers and three untrained teachers); one with a smaller registered school with nine trained teachers and 384 pupils; and a third unregistered school with three untrained teachers (including the headmaster) and 89 pupils drawn from one farm.

Background and context of the research

Before we looked at the children's identification and response to issues in more detail, we first asked, is there a school on the farm? And, is it registered or not? Both these factors have an immediate bearing on the context in which the issues can be examined. The majority of children on farms have a very strong desire to go to school and will try to overcome almost every hurdle to do so, although in many ways they are powerless before the innumerable handicaps that confront them.

Is there a school on the farm?

Approximately 14.8 per cent of all commercial farms have primary schools either registered or unregistered on their farms. Most farms that have schools also employ a high number of workers.[6] In all but the most remote farms,

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[5] Participatory Rural Appraisal is both a philosophy and a methodology. Focusing on process the methodology emphasizes maximum participation of the beneficiaries, leading to attitude and behaviour change. It can be used is to create awareness, motivate, investigate and analyse situations and issues.

[6] USAID/FEWS, 1998

these schools draw children from neighbouring farms, as 85.2 per cent of farms do not have schools – although increasingly farmers are beginning to club together to build schools for a particular catchment area.

To register or not to register a school?

The issue of whether or not to register a primary school on commercial farms has always been a difficult one. Most farmers find the government requirements for registration extremely difficult to achieve, both financially and physically. Government for example stipulates that a school can only be registered if it has:

- a minimum of 280 pupils in grades one to seven.
- buildings that meet government specifications.
- adequate sanitary facilities, which include separate toilets, not only for boys and girls, but also for male and female teachers, no matter how few teachers there are at the school.
- appropriate accommodation for the teachers.

There are however considerable advantages to registration which include:

- teachers' salaries being paid by government.
- a *per capita* book and materials grant to the school, based on the number of students who attend it.
- regular supervision of the teachers, which includes monitoring the adherence to the approved curricula.
- children being allowed to sit the final grade seven examination.

However, registered or unregistered, schools in the commercial farming areas are under-resourced. The headmasters from six registered schools listed their greatest needs as follows:

More classrooms, textbooks, library books, classroom furniture, fencing wire, garden tools, recreational facilities and teachers' houses.

Needs of a registered school

For the school to fulfil its Mission Statement of 'providing quality and diversified education to pupils and bring about worthy citizens' we need

- *a reliable good water supply for the school e.g. tapped water*
- *adequate reading materials e.g. textbooks and library books – a school library is one of our priorities*
- *adequate accommodation for teachers and for instruction – hot-seating is not conducive to good learning.*
- *sporting equipment – balls and uniforms*
- *a duplicating machine would be of great help to our teachers to supplement reading materials for our children.*

This evidence suggests the importance of the farmers and the government being able to work together, as funds can only be sourced through co-operation as the parents at farm schools are not able to make any financial contribution to the school's development and welfare. Thus, perhaps the greatest disadvantage as far as the farmers are concerned is the absence of any consultative forum where farmers and the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture can meet to discuss various issues pertaining to the school on their property. Issues which concern farmers when they are considering registering their school include:

- the appointment of teachers without reference to the farmer on whose property they will live.
- the dismissal of unregistered teachers, who may have been at the school a long time and know both the pupils and their families.
- the introduction or increase of school fees and developmental levies, when many unregistered farm schools do not charge any fees.

If, due to the lack of a consultative forum, registration appears to have disadvantages, it is the children who suffer if they are unable to

sit their grade seven examinations because their school is unregistered. If they are to sit the exam they have to be accepted as candidates at a registered school and this implies that there is a school nearby and that both headmasters are co-operative. Not being able to sit this final primary school exam is a grave disincentive to children, as they need the qualification in order to attend secondary school, and for many this is the ultimate goal.

The issue of access to education is also affected by the relationship between the farm owners and the farm community. It seems that there is often not much regular communication between the schools and the responsible authorities; and that the former tend to make contact only on those occasions when they need financial support. Some farmers willingly pay school fees (if children from their farms are attending a neighbouring school), others do not; some farmers contribute substantially towards the provision of exercise and text-books, others do not. Most would prefer regular formal communication with meetings organized in advance. *Ad hoc*, irregular and informal requests, do not generally help to develop the relationship between the farmer and the school.

However when there is co-operation between the school, the farm owner or responsible authority and the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, the results can be very positive. As one headmaster said, 'I managed to persuade the responsible authority to donate the land on which the school was built to the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, hence the assistance of government in the construction of eight Blair toilets, and two classroom blocks.'

Tensions can also develop between the school and the farm community over, for instance, the question of housing. One example which was raised was when the responsible authority wanted to provide new housing for teachers, but the farm supervisor objected on the grounds that this should first be provided for the workers. He argued that it was they, not the teachers who contributed towards the farm's profitability. He was supported by those workers who did not have children at the school. None the less many teachers have poor or inadequate housing and this, combined with distance of many farms from urban conurbations and the lack of public transport, make it difficult to attract and retain qualified teachers.

If the cost and availability of housing is a difficulty, so too is the maintenance and development of classroom and other school facilities. A large percentage of farm schools only go up to grades four or five. Consequently, many of the children who drop out of school have reached the top grade at the farm school. Others are only able to continue to grade seven by walking to another school on an adjacent farm or in a communal area. These conclusions

Table 1: Primary school enrolment

Total	boys	girls	Comments
183	99	84	Reg. School. Grades 1-7. Serves two farms. Nos decrease by grade.
160	94	66	Unreg: Grades 1-7. Serves three farms.
140	81	59	Unreg: Grades 1-7. Serves three farms.
260	140	120	Reg. School. Grades 1-7. Serves several farms. Has hot-seating.
49	25	24	Unreg: Grades 1-3. Serves one farm.
26	16	10	Unreg: Grades 1-3. Serves one farm.
24	17	7	Unreg: Grades 1-3. Serves one farm.
495	278	217	*Reg. School. Grades 1-7. Serves several farms and a communal area.

**This school serves nine farms, with the furthest farm being over ten kilometres away. The school, according to the headmaster is well equipped, with the farmer doing all the developments himself.*

are corroborated by a study[7] on the farms in Mashonaland West, which indicated that 60 per cent of all drop-outs occur in grades five and six, and only 15 per cent in grade seven. The following table gives the enrolment figures as at August 1998 at eight primary farm schools from five districts: three of the schools were registered and five unregistered. It also gives data relating to the number of farms served by the schools. The latter gives some indication of the distribution of primary schools on farms in Mashonaland Central.

Unfortunately, however, the lack of data regarding the total number of children of school-going age on each farm, made it impossible to ascertain the actual percentage attendance per farm. It is, however, interesting that the number of boys attending primary school, although greater than the number of girls, is not excessively so. A similar pattern of enrolment was identified during the period 1993-95, with enrolment being composed of 53 per cent boys and 47 per cent girls, in Mashonaland West.[8] Girls are initially as keen as boys to attend school and the parents appear willing to allow them to attend school up to grades 4-5. Thereafter, however, girls start to drop out of school for a variety of reasons.

It is within this context that we will now consider the difficulties that are being faced by children as identified during their discussions with the PRA facilitators, both adults and youth. These issues have been considered under five very broad themes: motivation and support (emotional and financial); distance from the school; family hindrances; gender; and culture, all of which are interrelated.

[7] Mugabe, 1997

[8] Mugabe, 1997

Section 3

Children's access to education on commercial farms: an overview of the difficulties

> ***Amina*** *is ten years old. She lives eleven kilometres from the nearest primary school. She has to wake up at 4.30 a.m. and run every day to school with the boys. She wants to continue with school but she is afraid. Other girls dropped out because they were chased by strangers on their way back home from school.*
>
> ***Chipo*** *got pregnant when she was fourteen. She used to gamble at night with other girls and see boyfriends. Now she has to look after her baby, and her husband will not pay for her to continue with school. He has three other wives, who make her work hard.*
>
> ***Zvidozvashe*** *dropped out of school after grade four. After his mother's death, his father remarried and had four children. Now he complains that they are at school and clothed better than he is, and he was made to stop school.*

A large number of children on commercial farms, between the ages of six and eighteen, have limited access to formal education. However, as these three brief synopses indicate, there are many, often interrelated, reasons why children are not at school.

- Poverty: this puts school fees (if there are any), uniforms, exercise and textbooks out of reach. It often requires children of school age to work or marry, gamble or resort to prostitution.
- Distance: there are no farm schools within easy walking distance of the farm village. Young children are most affected. Girls can be sexually harassed and assaulted on their way to and from school.
- Hunger: children often attend school without having eaten and without food. This affects their ability to concentrate. Fainting from hunger is not uncommon. If there is no money at month-end, children may absent themselves from school because they are hungry.
- Orphanhood: Orphans are often excluded from education as they are an additional burden on their supporting family; in addition, they are required to work in the home or fields to pay for their upkeep.
- Illiteracy: children whose parents are not literate, do not always see the value of education and prefer their children to (a) help in the home or (b) generate income.
- Labour: children often seek, or are required by their parents to seek, ways of earning money. Thus at busy times of the year they will undertake casual work on the farm. These absences from school mean they fall behind with school work. This can cause them to drop out, particularly if the headmaster is not sympathetic.
- Gender: often there is a cultural preference for boys, rather than girls, going to school. If circumstances require a child to drop out of school, the girl is often the first to be affected.

- Girls may be withdrawn from school to care for younger siblings so that the mother can take up piece/part-time or full-time work on the farm.
- They may be forced into early marriages if there is sufficient financial gain from bridewealth. Such attitudes are often related to specific cultural beliefs that encourage early marriages for girls.
- Fathers quite often do not see the point of educating a girl who will subsequently belong to another family or household.
- Women indicated that they had no choice but to concur with their husband's decision, if the latter chose to educate the male rather than the female children.
- Girls may find boyfriends at an early age and see marriage as a positive alternative to doing household chores and looking after siblings before and after the school day.

However it would seem that some of the parental tendencies, which favour the education of boys over girls, are diminishing, if slowly. Girls are beginning to argue for themselves that if they are educated they will take better care of their families, including their parents. The reservations that many women had about their husband's opinions, indicate that they have an alternative, more positive, view towards the education of the girl child, as does their distress when a girl chooses to have a boyfriend and leave school at a young age. Moreover, in one of the focus group discussions, both girls and boys seemed to appreciate the benefits of attending school. They indicated they want to learn new things to prepare for a good future and to take care of their patents. The girls in one school said the following:

- *I am happy about school, to get educated so I can look after my parents who have sent me to school.*
- *[I want] to give my parents what they cannot afford now.*
- *I want school. I don't want to end up working on the farm. I want to be a teacher.*

When there is no support or encouragement from the parent, none of the obstacles mentioned above can be easily overcome.

Children's assessment of their difficulties

In the SCF participatory research programme, 1,072 children were asked to identify the difficulties that inhibited their going to school, and rank them according to their relative importance. They found this easy to do and the results are listed below.

In the participatory sessions facilitated by adults (see table below) and by youth, there was little

Table 2: Difficulties that inhibit schooling

	Discussions facilitated by youth	Discussions facilitated by adults
1	Lack of interest on the part of the child	Lack of interest on the part of the child
2	No money for school fees	No money for school fees
3	No money for school uniforms/clothes	No money for school uniforms
4	Becoming an orphan	Food shortages at home
5	Early marriages	Distance from school
6	Desire to work on the farm	Children having to work on the farm
7	Teenage pregnancies	Families too large to afford fees etc.
8	Absence of birth certificate	Early marriages
9	Looking after siblings	Lack of a secondary school
10	Fear of teachers: beatings, rape	Parental illness
11	Lack of parental support for education	Lack of parental support for education

variation in the range of issues identified. There were, however, differences in ranking. Thus, for example, sensitive issues, such as orphanhood, teenage pregnancies, a desire to work on the farm and the lack of birth certificates were perceived as being important in sessions facilitated by the youth, but not raised in the sessions facilitated by adults.

The eleven issues identified below, represent the most important issues as ranked by the children themselves.

Various issues raised by the children are considered in more detail below and will include the children's own stories and their drawings, as visual representations of issues

The children interviewed stated that some children don't want to attend school for the following reasons:

The child lacks motivation and interest

It is interesting that in discussions facilitated by adults, children identified working on farms as 'child labour' but qualified this when the youth facilitated these discussions by using the phrase 'a desire to work'. This difference in perception provided another insight as to why children (a) do not attend school, or (b) drop out of school. The children's analysis revealed that some children do not attend school because:

- they just do not value education.
- they want to fish, gamble, and swim.
- they want to join the *zvigure* (masked) dances and get married.
- there was peer pressure to do the above.

During the collation of the data collected, the youth facilitators felt that this cluster of issues should be summarized as 'children's lack of interest in school'. When the children's reasons for non-attendance at school were ranked, this cluster was perceived by the children themselves to be the most important issue. This led to a re-examination of the data gathered by the adult facilitators. It was then found that when statements such as 'girls not interested', 'children gambling', 'boys fishing', were added to the simple 'children's lack of interest', similar results emerged.

Peer pressure

Peer pressure also affects many children. The choice between having to walk a long way to school, or stay on the farm to fish, gamble or work, make the latter options far more attractive. The children explained their own lack of interest as follows:

- *We go out looking for wild fruits [and to] catch birds and fish. It's better than school.*
- *We did not sleep yesterday, because we were playing music at the beerhall the night before, so it's no use going to school* i.e. because they would be tired and fall asleep.

Some young girls dodge school because they want to play *nyore* (a gambling game), which they learn from their parents.

Many children who have little interest in attending school are girls who choose to marry early. Others have to remain at home to undertake domestic tasks, or to care for younger siblings, while the mother is employed.

Although the child's lack of motivation, and the lack of parental support were seen as two different items, separated by a range of issues, we thought it useful to bring them together for the purposes of this discussion.

A lack of parental support and encouragement

The children felt there were strong links between a child's lack of motivation and a lack of parental support. Parents with little or no education, often do not perceive the value of sending their children to school. And even when such children begin school, they tend to drop out after a year or two. A lack of adult encouragement gives rise to such statements as, 'We do not know whether it's wrong or right to go to school, because we do not see the difference.'

This view was also ranked as either problem number one or two on almost every farm where

an adult was interviewed in the PRA research. For example, first generation farmworkers from Mozambique (who left because of the civil war) represent a group of adults who had no education. Of 25 children who participated in the research on one farm, sixteen were born in Zimbabwe of foreign parents, twelve of whom were from Mozambique. One young boy tearfully related how he was forced to stop going to school, by his Mozambican father.

'My child, Fungizo, eat the vegetables your mother has cooked for you, and then go fishing. Don't go to school.

Father I want to go to school and learn said Fungizo.

Son, I have told you, go fishing for food and don't go to school.

Please, Father, I want to go to school.

If you go to school, don't come back again. Stay away forever and never come back.

A reason for this is that children are expected to contribute to the family's livelihood. To bring fish home to eat fulfills a tangible and immediate need, unlike education. Indeed parents with no education may actively encourage such children to leave. This, at least, was the opinion of one headmaster and it was echoed by several other teachers.

Schools can be intimidating places for people without education, and their response to education may be dismissive. 'Parents are not interested in what takes place at school. They even use the invitation letters for school meetings to roll their cigarettes.'

However in schools where the teachers communicate effectively with the parents in the community a more positive attitude seems to prevail. In one school, parents decided to help ensure that children found loitering during school hours should be sent back to the school.

Moreover in the focus-group discussions, the children said that parents wanted them to be educated so that they could do 'better jobs than theirs'. They all agreed, however, that parents would only be supportive if the child was doing well. 'If you do not pass, the parents just say, "Stop, my child." And you stop even if you want to continue.' The children also said that they felt very happy when their parents were supportive and when they ululate and celebrate on prize-giving days.

Several suggestions were made in discussions with parents who recognized that they had a role to play in creating an enabling school environment and should support their children financially and by providing encouragement. They said, 'the government should help the farmer build a secondary school. It is too much for him alone.'

However the lack of a conducive home environment militates against children benefiting adequately from their schooling. Children find it extremely difficult to do their homework, as one child explained:

We do not have adequate accommodation. The boys have to use the dining room as their bedroom and it is difficult to study at night because our father comes back from the beerhall drunk and makes a lot of noise. This is worsened by neighbours who open their radios loudly so that one can hardly concentrate.

Other children said:

The houses do not have electricity and this is a hindrance to any evening studies. We come home from school late and we cannot do our homework, because there is no place to do it, and we have too many jobs to do first for our mother.

There are other issues that make it difficult for children to benefit fully from their education; issues which create a feeling of hopelessness, as these children explained:

- *There is only one water point in the village and there is a lot of congestion. Sometimes the water is closed. When there is no water we have to go to school hungry and dirty, as we cannot bath. Sometimes we'd rather not go.*
- *The beerhalls are too many on farms; nearly every farm has one, but only a few have schools. If we do not get enough education, we do not get good jobs; we end up being street kids, marrying early or engaging in prostitution.*

School fees and uniforms

There is an undoubted correlation between the low farmworkers' wages and inability to pay school fees. Although the majority of farmworkers earn the minimum wage, which for the lowest grade is $763.69, and are accommodated on the farms at no extra cost to themselves, the spiralling cost of living makes their income inadequate to cope with their family commitments. The 1995 Urban Poverty Datum Line (PDL), established for a Harare household of six which included education costs, was Z$1,534.12, while a study carried out in Hurungwe communal area in 1998 established a PDL for a family of six to be Z$2 934.[1] Single mothers, who make up a large percentage of casual workers, especially in the flower and horticultural industries, seldom have money for school fees for any child. As the majority of farm schools are privately owned, school fees are usually, if nominally, charged. The fees payable at eight private farm schools ranged between $10 and $45 a term. In addition children usually have to buy books and other materials. At registered primary schools on farms, there are no direct tuition fees, but pupils are required to pay a General Purpose Fee or a Developmental Levy which ranges from Z$100 to Z$150, while at secondary schools these average Z$250. The difficulties experienced by parents in regard to school fees were articulated by two of the children we interviewed and are typical of many others.

- *The school fees are too much for our parents to afford, especially considering that we [in our family] are many children. We pay Z$100 per term at the primary school (a registered school) and Z$225 at secondary school, and you cannot attend school without uniforms.*
- *We pay Z$45 a term (unregistered primary school), but we are told to also buy books and pens. We do not know what they do with our school fees.*

If it is difficult to pay school fees, then it is also difficult to buy school uniforms. Not having a uniform was identified by the children as a key reason for not attending school, as they are very reluctant to face punishment or be sent home again for not wearing a uniform – the practice in most schools. As one young boy said:

> *You just do not know how embarrassing it is to be sent back home for school fees. We feel very angry and some of us even cry on the way home, because we know that is the end of the road for our education.*

Another young girl, who had dropped out because she had no uniform, said,

> *We would want so much to go to school, but we are embarrassed to go in our tattered clothes.*

A uniform (dress or shirts and shorts plus a pair of shoes) costs $500 a year. For parents earning the minimum wage this is a large undertaking, especially if they have more than one child at school.

However some children saw this issue as a question of priority and complained that their parents used their money selfishly on things that they regarded as having no or little value. 'If my parents didn't drink and smoke so much, they could send me to school.'

> *Some parents even get beer on credit, but cannot buy ball points for their children.*

Indeed inappropriate parental priorities was an issue which some children identified as diminishing the amount invested in education by both the family and the farmer.

> *We can't go to school because our farm parents drink a lot. The little they earn is spent on beer. They think primary school is enough. They don't know that days have changed. We farm children are in trouble. Our parents don't know how to save even a dollar. When they drink, you think they are rich. I say they must reduce drinking to support their children. They must teach us good manners. We don't want to do what they are doing when we grow up.*

No child who participated in the study was receiving any assistance for school fees, developmental levies or materials, from the Department of Social Welfare. As primary school education is still theoretically free, no assistance is given for other costs at primary

[1] Mundy, 1995 and MacGarry, 1998.

school level. The Ministry appears not to understand that if no support is given to put a child through primary school, that child will never be in a position to apply for support at secondary level when school fees are paid.

Financial assistance from farmers for school fees or uniforms was not discussed by the children, but attested to by parents and farm health workers on 12/27 farms. Teachers interviewed on four farms, maintained that the farmers paid the fees for the orphans and on one farm bought their uniforms as well. On another farm, the farmer covered the cost of school fees for all the children attending the farm school, while others assisted with school furniture, textbooks, housing for teachers and transport.

Poverty is none the less at the root of many of these problems. Be it school fees or uniforms, the child's contribution to the upkeep of the household, or the fact that people simply live from day to day rather than invest in the future, are all factors which negatively impact on the parent's decision to send a child to school. In addition, children who have had some schooling and subsequently find work on the farm, rarely receive any financial remuneration for their schooling i.e. in the fields it does not matter whether you have grade seven education or not.

Distance to school

Distance to school has considerable bearing on attendance, particularly in the early years of primary education, resulting in a high drop-out rate in grade one, as young children of six to eight are unable to walk long distances and they cannot always keep up with the older children. For the latter, long distances make regular and meaningful education more difficult. Very often children have to walk for up to two hours to school, unless the farmer is willing to provide transport for them.

On nine farms surveyed, 296 children of school-going age were not attending school. Of these, 163 lived on two farms, one of which was at a considerable distance from a school. The other had a school on the farm, but with only five grades. On a third farm, which was more than ten kilometres from a school, there were only ten drop-outs – possibly because the farmer provided transport for the children. The mean distance from commercial farms to a registered or unregistered primary school is 7.3 kilometres and 5.1 kilometres respectively, while the mean distance from a government secondary school is 14.3 kilometres.[2] In other words children were walking between 10.2 and 26.6 kilometres a day. However, distance from a school is not simply a question of a long walk. This situation is generally exacerbated by issues such as leaving for school on an empty stomach and fear of being punished for arriving late.

The following children's comments highlight these problems.

- *We walk more than ten kilometres to school. We arrive late at 10.00 a.m. when others have learnt a lot. We leave school before classes finish, so as to get home by dark. Sometimes we reach home by 7.00 p.m. We cannot do any homework, because we will be tired, so it's no use going to school.*
- *Very few people understand our problems. Some of us walk long distances to school, and when we arrive late the teachers don't forgive us – we are beaten or punished severely. It is not that we are rude, but the farm environment is hard to explain. I feel this treatment should stop. Teachers should sympathize with us.*
- *We do not attend any extra-curricula activities because we have to leave school earlier than other children, since we have to travel a long distance home.*
- *Children who have to travel over ten kilometres, leave home early and travel on an empty stomach, and spend the whole day without eating, so some would rather stay at home.*
- *One boy fainted at school because of hunger; most of us go to school on empty stomachs or just drink* maheu *(nutritious drink) before we leave home.*

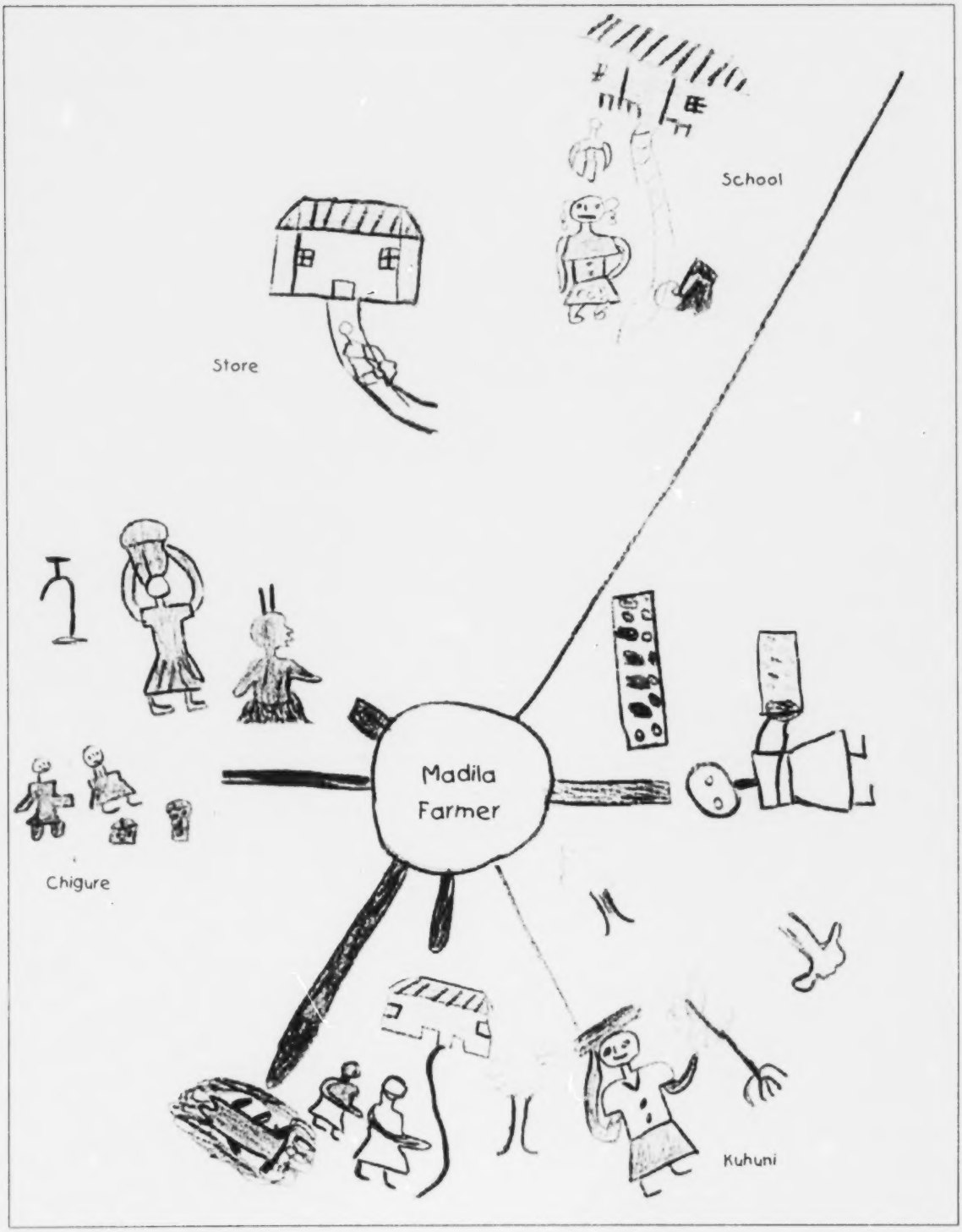
Moreover children who go to stay with other relatives who live nearer a school are often not well treated and often made to do a disproportionate number of household chores which affects their attendance at school.

[2] USAID/FEWS, 1998

The teachers interviewed supported this statement, one saying:

> *The number of children attending school falls as the term progresses, because at the beginning of term children come to live with relatives who are close to a school, but with time the children cannot tolerate the treatment they get from their relatives so they leave and some go to other relatives.*

The mobility maps that follow, highlight the children's perception of the distance to school, while the village map depicts the importance



Mobility Map 1 – Girls (Madila Farm)

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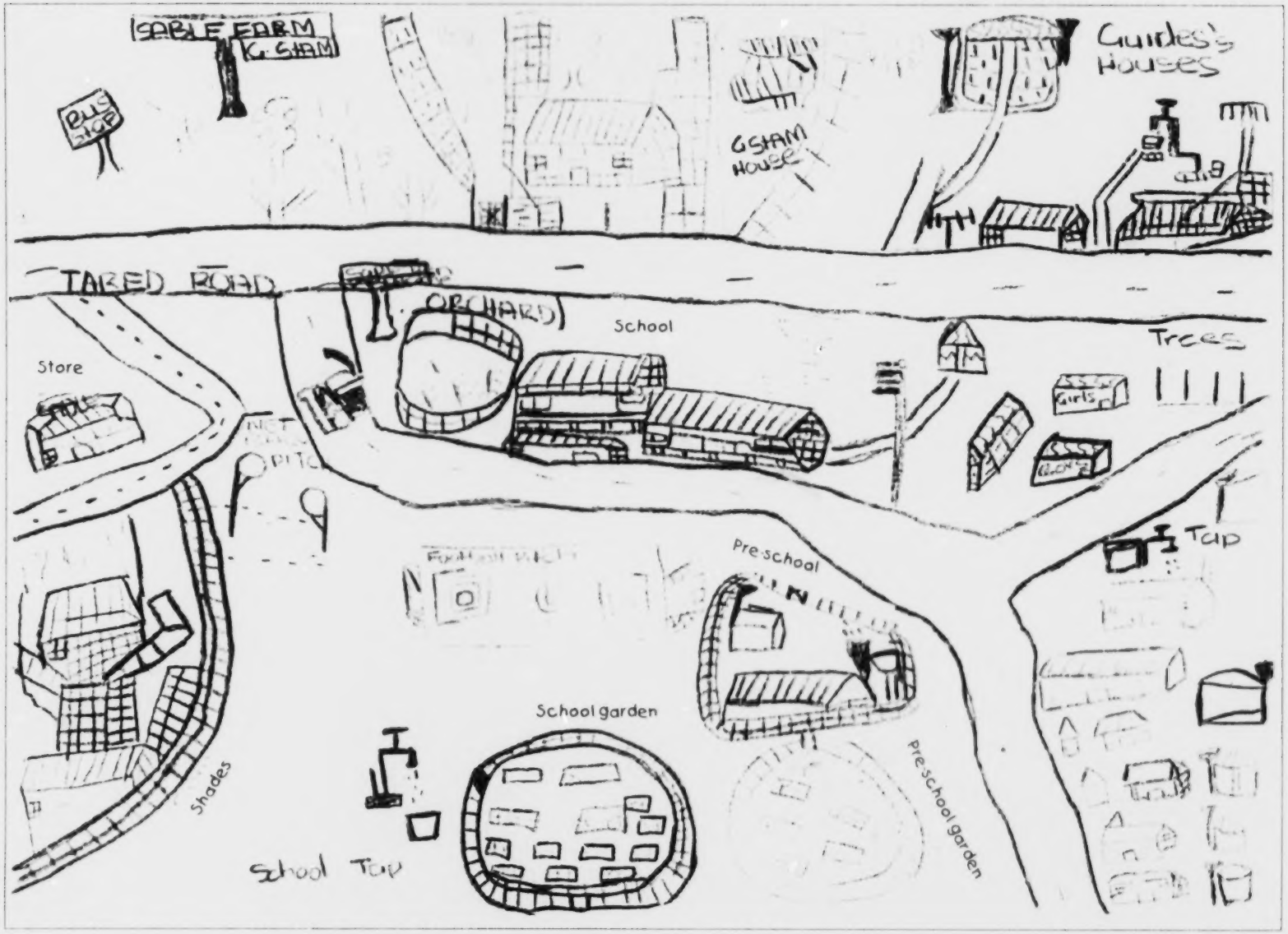


Mobility Map 2

35

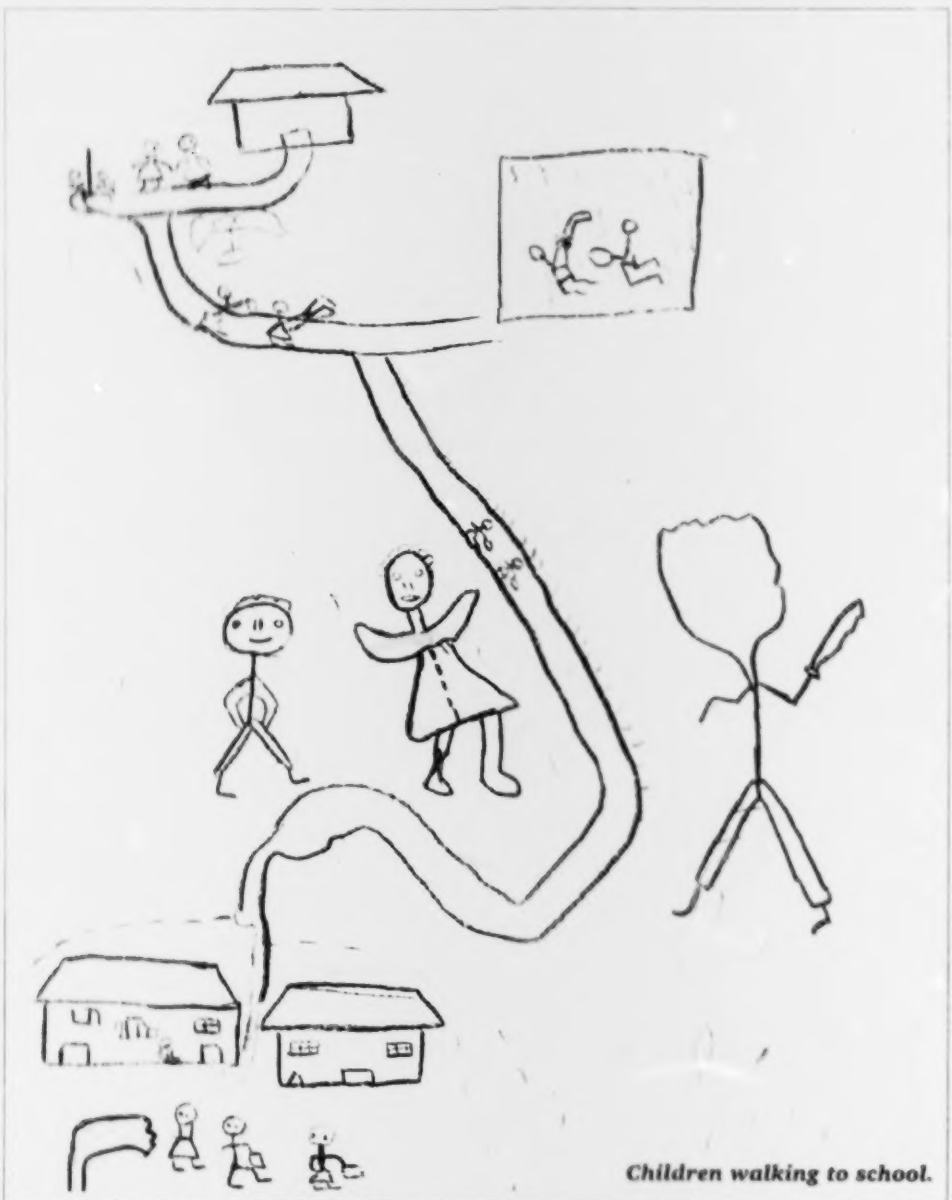
of a farm school to the children, shown by its prominent place in the picture:

For girls, a long walk to school militates against their attendance, particularly as they cannot return until after dark. The girls interviewed talked of strangers waiting to attack them:

The picture below depicts the girls' fear of being waylaid by strangers.

A considerable proportion of the drop-outs on the commercial farms in Zimbabwe, are children unable to continue to secondary school, as there are few secondary schools within fifteen kilometres of the farms, no buses in the commercial farming areas, and boarding fees become an additional burden. Only those few children, who have relatives or friends they can stay with, attend secondary school in either an adjacent communal area or town. One young boy in grade five had this to say about the lack of secondary schools.

> *Who is to blame when we end up in the street? We children from the farms don't have secondary schools near us ... So with primary education where can we go? Nowhere, except*



Children walking to school.

to work on the farm, when we are still young. We [are] also forced to marry when we are young or we end up on the streets. This is very bad. We want secondary schools on the farms. We want to be skilled workers. I feel that the government and the farmers are not doing enough for us.

Extended families, polygamy and step-children

On almost every farm, the question of school fees was related to polygamy and family size. The children condemned them as obstacles to school attendance. In most polygamous marriages, it would seem that the children of the youngest wife attend school, as sometimes do the older boys. In such situations, the girls feel resentful because invariably their education is stopped. One girl indicated that there were twenty members in her family, so only a few of the boys went to school, while others complained that their parents did not use family planning methods.

Very often today, large families include the children of relatives who have died, making it very difficult, if not impossible, for money to be found for all the children's schooling. The following is the story of a child, whose schooling was threatened from being in just such a situation.

Rudo is twelve years old, and she lives on Mutasa farm, a fairly large, intensively cropped farm. There are five children in her family, and her parents are poor. But her mother used to do seasonal work and Rudo helped her in the holidays, so they managed to make enough to keep the older children at school. The farmer's wife also occasionally helped her with clothes, shoes, and sometimes even with school fees, as she did with other children.

The most recent activity on the farm, however, has been rose growing. And Rudo wishes that they had never seen the roses because now her mother has full-time work. Once she used to be at home during the day, but now she leaves the house at 5.45 a.m. to do an early shift and Rudo is left to collect water, prepare something for her siblings to eat and then make sure her youngest sisters get to the pre-school. They stay there until she collects them at three o'clock. Her brothers go early to school in order to play soccer, taking some bread for their lunch, and she seldom sees her father. He rises early, helps himself to bread and tea and then is gone for the day. He rarely comes home before dark.

Rudo used to love school. Once she had a uniform and could afford to buy a pencil and sometimes a book. The teacher always said she was bright, and that one day she could probably go to secondary school – Rudo's dream. She wanted to be a nurse, and knew she had to complete her secondary education to get in. But now she is afraid this will not happen.

Six months ago her father's brother and his wife died, and two of their sons came to live with their uncle. Since their arrival there hasn't been enough food or money for school, let alone uniforms. Rudo doesn't complain as long as she can keep going to school. There is no school on the farm she lives on, although there are so many children in the village. The school they all attend is on an adjacent farm four kilometres away and Rudo has to hurry through her chores, and then run all the way to school. She tries not to mind her torn clothes, and when she can find some thread she mends the worst of the tears.

When Rudo gets home at three o'clock she must start immediately to clean the house, collect water, wood and prepare some vegetables for the evening meal. There is only one water tap in the village which means she has to queue for water, and then she remembers that she has also to water the vegetables at the pre-school this week, on her mother's behalf. This means another trip for water, before she can begin the evening meal.

Rudo is so busy that it takes a while for her to realize that her little brother (cousin) is crying in the house, and fearing she will be blamed for his tears, she tries to comfort him. It seems he too misses school:

'If my parents were not dead I could go to school and have a uniform,' he cries and he continues to cry until her father returns home. Neither boy has yet been able to go to school as her parents cannot afford the additional fees. Now Rudo hears her parents discussing their problems long into the night. Later that week, her mother tells her of her father's problem about not educating his brother's sons, and adds that maybe Rudo will have to stay at home for a year so that her brothers can go to school. Rudo's heart felt it would break – she couldn't leave school.

Later that day she sat crying on her mother's lap, crying for her lost dreams of school, of being a nurse, of escaping the drudgery of doing the work at home and caring for her brothers and sisters. Her mother talked

of the insecurity they all faced, of the sickness that was affecting so many people and the hardships ahead of them.

Some weeks later the farmer's wife came to visit her mother, to discuss the Women's Club activities, and seeing Rudo at home asked her mother why she was not at school? At first her mother found it hard to tell her, but later they talked and the farmer's wife had a suggestion to make. The village had elected a Farm Health Worker the previous year, a good, elderly woman who could neither read nor write, and she had difficulty in playing with the children in the pre-school. She needed an assistant and if Rudo would help her, every day during the holidays, the farmer would pay for her school fees. Rudo could not believe it; it seemed too good to be true. Then she looked at her mother and saw the anxiety on her face: How will you manage to help me with all the work at home and assist the Farm Health Worker? was written all over it. But Rudo had seen her dream becoming a reality and determined that she would do whatever work came her way, so long as she could go to school.

Had Rudo's mother not had the link with the farmer's wife through the women's clubs it is doubtful that a solution would have been found, and it is doubtful that either the farmer or his wife would have been made aware of the difficulties that this family faced. Rudo was fortunate in that the farmer's wife intervention was supportive: this might not have been the case.

Divorce and remarriage

Divorce and remarriage are also condemned by the children, several children claiming that step-parents do not want to look after children that are not their own and therefore would not help with school fees. Very often it is only the children of the new stepmother who attend school. Daughters of a previous marriage are particularly victimized, many older girls being forced not only to leave school, but to marry as soon as possible. An eight-year-old girl said: 'My mother died, father remarried and refused to look after me, so my brother had to take me. I am now going to school like other children.'

Another ten-year-old girl, Blessing, whose mother was the third wife of her father and subsequently divorced, described her life as follows:

> *My father wanted to shoot my mother with the gun he was given as a security guard on the farm. My mother had four children with my father, the oldest is a boy and the only one at school. The rest of us are girls, and we had to leave school when my father went away. My brother is living with an aunt in Bindura and doing grade six. None of us have birth certificates, because my father won't spend the money to go to Bindura to do the registration, because he now lives in the rural areas with his second wife.*
>
> *My father wants to take us to the rural areas, but we do not want to go as his other children beat us. My mother has three other children from her first husband, and she may go back to him. But now we are staying on the farm, and last week my mother got a job there. We have been dependant on my grandmother who receives mealie-meal from the farmer, since her husband was struck by lightning last year.*

Blessing is hoping she will be able to go back to school, because she would like to be a hairdresser when she grows up.

Losing a parent: becoming an orphan

An enumeration process carried out on a large number of farms in Mashonaland Central, West and East has indicated that there are currently an average of fifteen orphans per farm. The Farm Orphan Support Trust (FOST) is currently working to establish community based care for these children, but has found that access to schooling is a major problem.

The current SCF research, similarly established that of the 69 orphans who participated in the activities on nineteen farms, 50 were not at school. The majority of children who have lost both parents, are currently being cared for by members of their extended family. However, in the current harsh economic climate, families have little money for their own children's schooling let alone for the extra children in their care. The following is a story of a young boy recently orphaned.

Mavhuto is an orphan. He does not know his age, but looks approximately ten years old. He is doing grade one at the farm school. His name which means problems or hard times aptly depicts his situation.

There are four boys in the family and they stay together, the oldest one (age not known) supporting the younger siblings. He works as a casual labourer on the farm. Three of the children are at school, but when the oldest fails to get enough money, they have to stay away. The children have no shoes or uniforms, and they have their first meal in the day at lunch-time.

When asked what caused a wound on his knee, Mavhuto said he had been burnt by a piece of burning plastic, while trying to make a fire. He also does other household duties such as dishwashing, sweeping and collecting firewood. When asked what he wanted to be when he grew up, Mavhuto said nothing, he just hid his head.

Another young boy recently orphaned, expressed his pain at the recent loss of parents, security and schooling:

> *To live on the farm is only good when your parents are alive and employed. When they die the farmers don't take care of us. We are forced to stop school and leave the farm. But where do we go? No one takes care of us. We end up in the streets begging for money and food. I think the farmers should keep us on the farms when our parents die. After all we are their future workers.*

Adults interviewed, described children orphaned who are living with extended families as follows:

> *These children are overworked. They are beaten and shouted at if they fail to do their work. They do not get new clothes and whenever there is work to be done, they are told not to go to school.*

The position of orphans on the farm is clearly the most vulnerable in terms of both deprivation and the difficulty of breaking out of the cycle of poverty and ignorance. However many children, as previously mentioned (see p.15) do not get the parental support in terms of educational possibilities that they so clearly want and are not well treated when they stay with relatives as a means of attending school.

The absence of birth certificates

Some 40 million children worldwide – one in three of all newborns – are unregistered each year.[3] Not having a birth certificate is a countrywide problem in Zimbabwe, but it is particularly obvious in remote areas and among people who are deemed to be of foreign origin, even when they have been in the country for several generations. In addition to denying them the right to a name and citizenship in the country of their birth, children without birth certificates are denied the right to education, as a child cannot write a grade seven exam without producing a birth certificate.

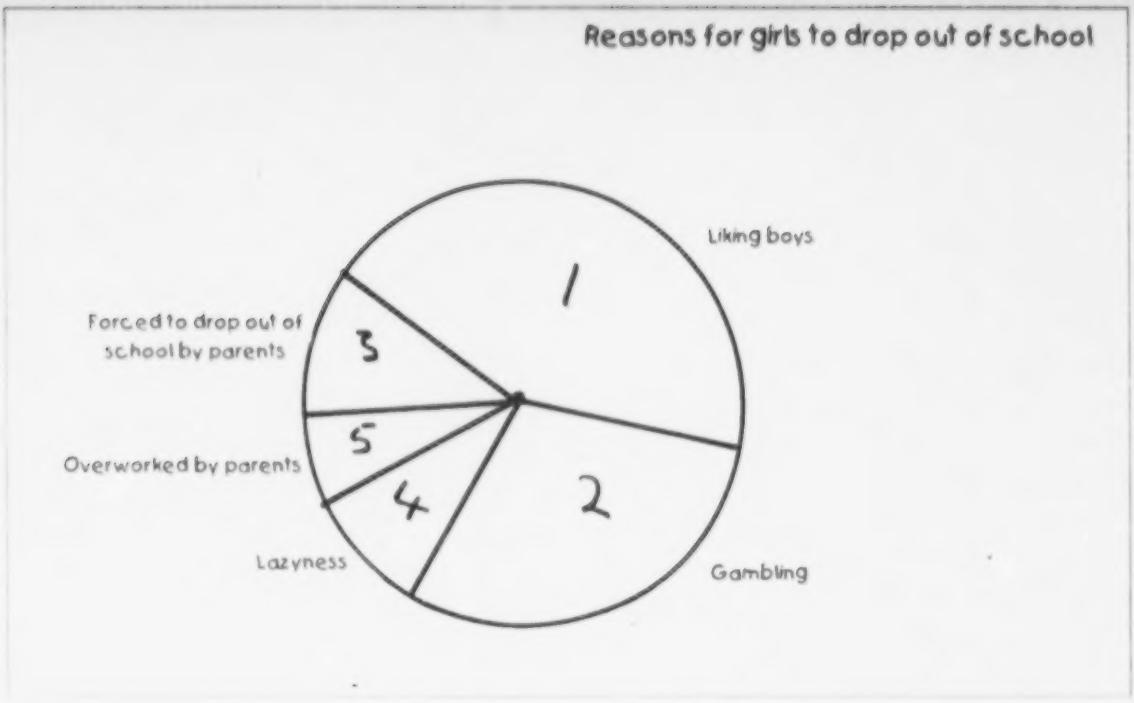
On commercial farms, the lack of birth certificates is of particular concern, as there are a relatively high number of children without them. Farmworkers have to travel considerable distances to towns and cities to register, but more importantly they find it almost impossible to meet the various government requirements in terms of documentation and authentication of a child's birth in the country.

Thirty-two children, 3 per cent of those who participated in the study, did not have birth certificates and they cited the lack of such certificates as one of the main problems related to access to schools, particularly for orphans. Some of the children urged their parents to get birth certificates for their children as soon as they are born, while others stressed the need for the government to make it easier for them to obtain these certificates.

Gender

Gender is a particularly important issue in regard to the non-attendance of girls at school. As one girl said: 'Some parents do not really care what their girl children do.'

[3] UNICEF Progress Report, 1998



And others added:

> *In some families only one child, especially a boy, is sent to school, while girls are sent to better off relatives.*
>
> *What's the use of sending girls to school? There is no profit from that, since the girls marry and join another family.*
>
> *Only boys have to go to school as they have the responsibility for looking after wives and children.*

Statements such as these highlight the contradiction in Article 17 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, 'Each person has the right to education and cultural life. The state has the duty to protect and promote morals and traditional values recognized by the community' and clearly warrants further discussion. When do traditional values which emphasize, for example, the superiority of men, disallow opportunities and advancement for women? And at what point should this be challenged?

The comments from children quoted above were supported in our discussions with parents who noted their reluctance to send girls to school for cultural reasons, and because the girls had to do domestic chores. A preference for sending boys to school was also apparent from the fact that even where there was a school on the farm, girls dropped out earlier than boys.

Even in those instances when the farmer is paying all the school fees, there are still girls who do not attend school. The cultural preference for educating boys rather than girls is exacerbated by poverty. Within this context twenty girls reported that they had dropped out of school, to:

- enable a brother to go to school.
- care for siblings and do the domestic work.
- work in order to assist financially with school fees for their brothers.

Thus the position of stepchildren and orphans is exacerbated when the child is a girl. Both are unlikely to attend school and certainly not for the full period of seven years.

Early marriages and teenage pregnancies

On nine farms, 56 girls were identified as having been married before they were sixteen years

old. Almost as many young men, although in most cases slightly older boys, had dropped out of school.

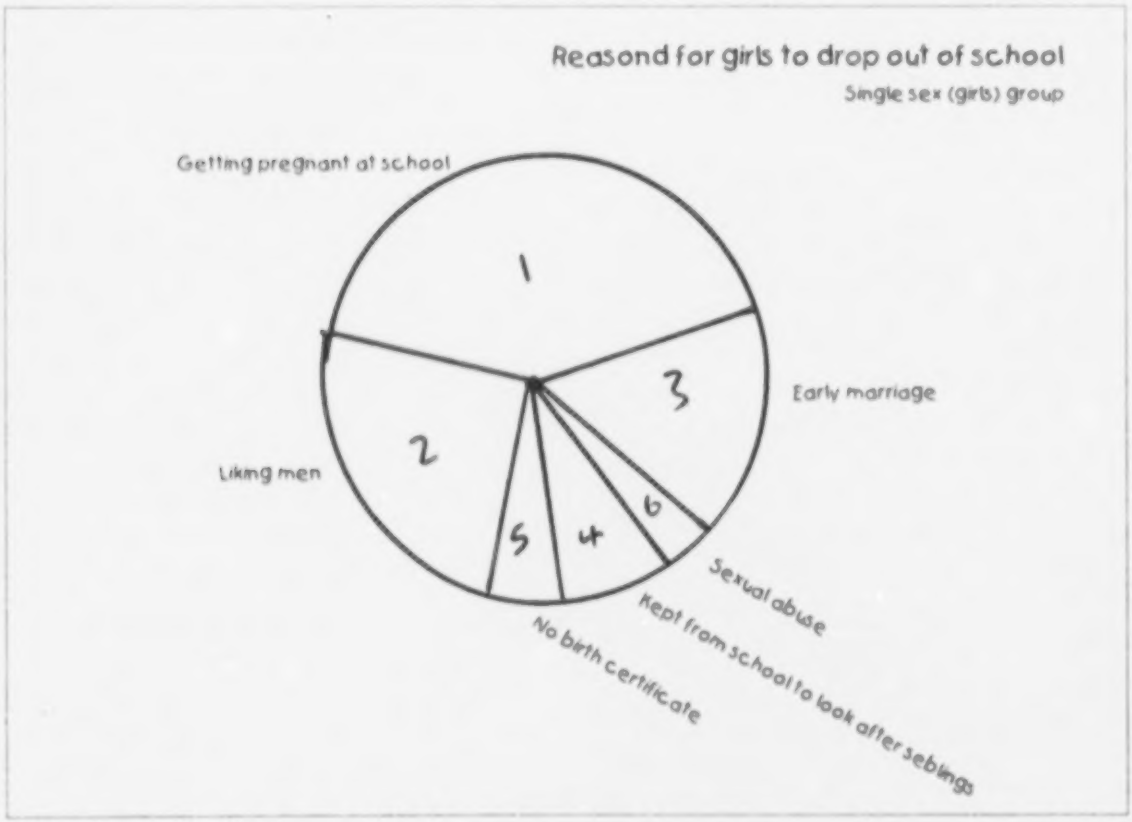
> *The boys are also marrying early, because there is no school to open their brains. So they just marry,* said a thirteen-year-old girl, while another young boy in answer to a question about boys marrying early, laughingly said, *Some of us children have our own children.*

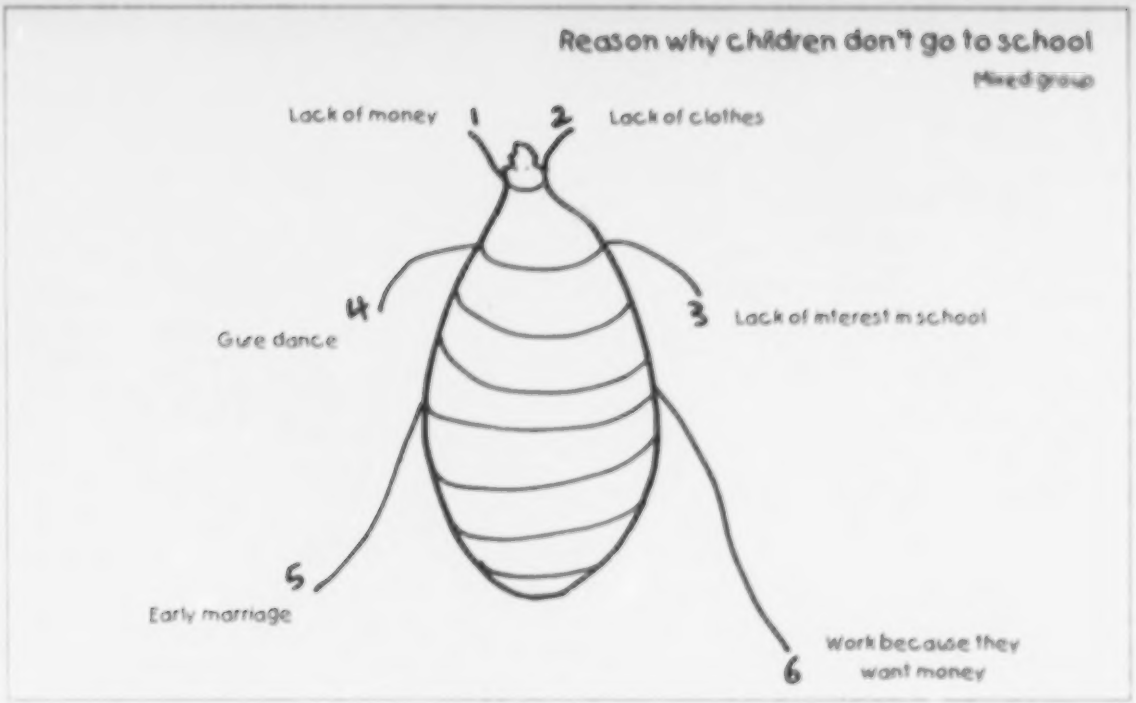
For the most part, early marriages involve girls with boys a little older than themselves. It was clear from a number of comments made by the former, that their status in the community and a degree of economic independence were the main reasons for early marriages. But for some girls, marriage was a preferable option to an unhappy family situation. This included: (a) exclusion from school in preference to boys; (b) or a preference for sending own children rather than stepchildren or orphans to school; and (c) a desire to get away from the household and baby-minding chores. Many young girls expressed a desire for an early marriage, pregnancy being a way to ensure marriage.

The following comments highlight some of the above issues:

> *Some girls love boys a lot, such that they end up not valuing education.*
>
> *Girls want to start their own families, to be independent.*
>
> *Some envy young girls who are married and want to have babies and be respected by other children.*
>
> *Some want to gain the respect of the community by marrying.*
>
> *Some think that if they are married, their lives will improve.*
>
> *Some run away from ill-treatment by step-parents or even their own parents.*
>
> *Some orphans marry so as to have someone to look after them.*
>
> *Some would have dropped out of school, so marriage is better.*

In 42/47 mixed group discussions, facilitated by the youth, children maintained that early marriages were by choice. In another five, young adolescents claimed that some girls are





forced by their parents into early marriages. One girl claimed that many parents force the girl from the house, because they want her to get married so that they can have the bridewealth. On the other hand, in the single sex group discussions, the girls supported the assertion that early marriages were by choice. The boys, however, predominantly claimed that they were forced into early marriages by:

- parents,
- circumstances (a girl claiming pregnancy),
- peer pressure,
- girls while under the influence of alcohol.

As an issue that prevents children attending school, early marriage was ranked fifth in order of importance in the mixed sex discussions facilitated by the youth. However, in some single sex group discussions, girls ranked early marriages as second or third in importance. This can be seen from the spider diagram above. Similar results were recorded in Mashonaland West, where early marriages and parent mobility were found to be the two major reasons why girls drop out of school.[4]

Peer group pressure as part of the social environment, cultural beliefs and practices was explained in the following ways:

- Girls expect to be married early and are often ashamed to be single at the age of eighteen. Most girls between the ages of fourteen and sixteen are already planning marriage as the next stage in their lives, and feel pity for girls not married by the time they are eighteen. This, however, is a culturally conditioned response – early marriage for girls being customary.
- There is no perceived future for girls other than marriage. Some girls and boys seek employment on the farm, and the rest just roam around the village with nothing to do.
- Teenage pregnancies are fairly common according to 47 children who gave teenage pregnancies as a reason for school drop-outs. One headmaster said that the increasing number of school drop-outs, due to pregnancy and early marriages, was a result of diminishing parental control over their children.

[4] Mugabe, 1997

- Marriage generally, but not always, results from teen pregnancies. It is significant that the *roora* (bridewealth) given by the boy to the girl's father is small on farms. It generally consists of a chicken, two blankets or a goat, thus making it possible for youth to marry.

There are few pregnant single girls on farms. In addition, the parents pointed out, when a girl becomes pregnant, everyone will know the boy/man responsible, because farms are closed communities, unlike urban areas where the boys can just run away.

The following story illustrates this comment.

Taurai was a mother at fifteen. When she was in grade seven her father, who is a peasant farmer, told her that there was no money for school fees, so she stopped going to school. She stayed at home for some time and then got a job as the maid for a nurse at the district hospital in town. She had only worked for one month when she met her child's father who was doing form one. When she became pregnant, Gift's father was afraid because he was a dependent and he denied responsibility. Taurai lost her job and went back to the farm. When Gift was four months old she was told she must get a job to support the baby, and is hoping to get a job as a grader in the tobacco sheds, although she is worrying that it may be too hard. Although the child's father was in form one, he was 16 years old. As stated before, children are often much older than urban children would be in the equivalent grades, because their schooling has been so interrupted.

It is also significant that although Taurai was working for a nurse, there was no thought of obtaining contraceptives or advice about them. Attitudes to family planning on the farms, while not strictly part of this paper, need to be considered in terms of curriculum content (see Section 5).

- Promiscuity is common on farms and youthful marriages are often short-lived. One sixteen-year-old girl confessed,

  I got married when I was fifteen years old, but ran away from the man because I was too young to manage the home.

- Unfaithfulness and promiscuity were also commented on by the girls as follows:

  - *Some girls play with people who are married so they get a bad influence.*
  - *Some are enticed by boyfriends and become prostitutes.*

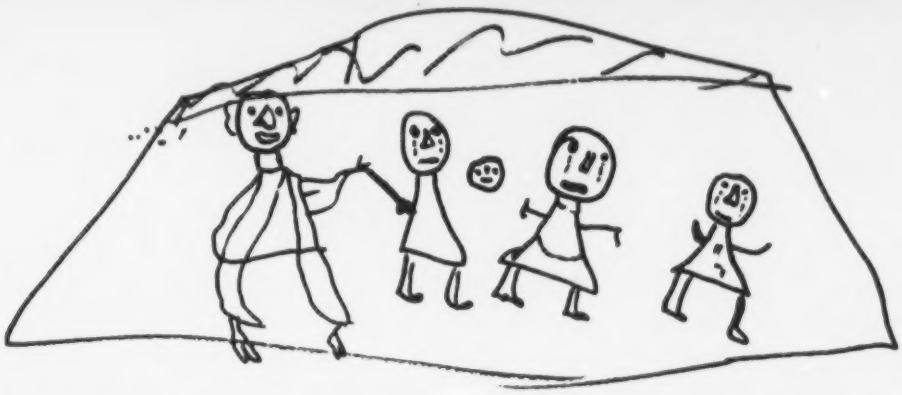
Given that in some ways the farm villages are both conservative and very moral, it would be useful to explore the meaning of the word 'prostitute' further. Indeed morality is often another cause of early marriages, as once a girl becomes pregnant, she must marry or face the shame of being a single mother. The concept of shame is tied up with her family's fear of having another mouth to feed.

Cultural issues and education

There are a number of cultural beliefs and practices that encourage early marriage, thereby working against the child attending or continuing with school. These practices, although affecting both boys and girls, involve more of the latter. These practices include:

- Friends (*vasahwira*) pledging children to each other at birth (*kuwirirana*).
- The Malawian *chinamwari* initiation rite requires girls as young as ten to undergo a period of seclusion where they receive, what could be described as 'education for life' together with sex education. At the end of the training period, they are perceived to have entered adulthood and can therefore get married; men particularly want to marry girls who have been through this rite.
- The circumcision rite, the male equivalent of *chinamwari*, when boys are also taught how to make love to girls.

Of the 27 farms surveyed, initiation rites were held on only five farms where there were large numbers of Malawian farmworkers. Many girls on these farms, however, are married from twelve to fourteen years of age. Children who had been through these rites were reluctant to talk about them, except to say that the training they received taught them to behave well when they were married, to look after their spouses and to be good partners.

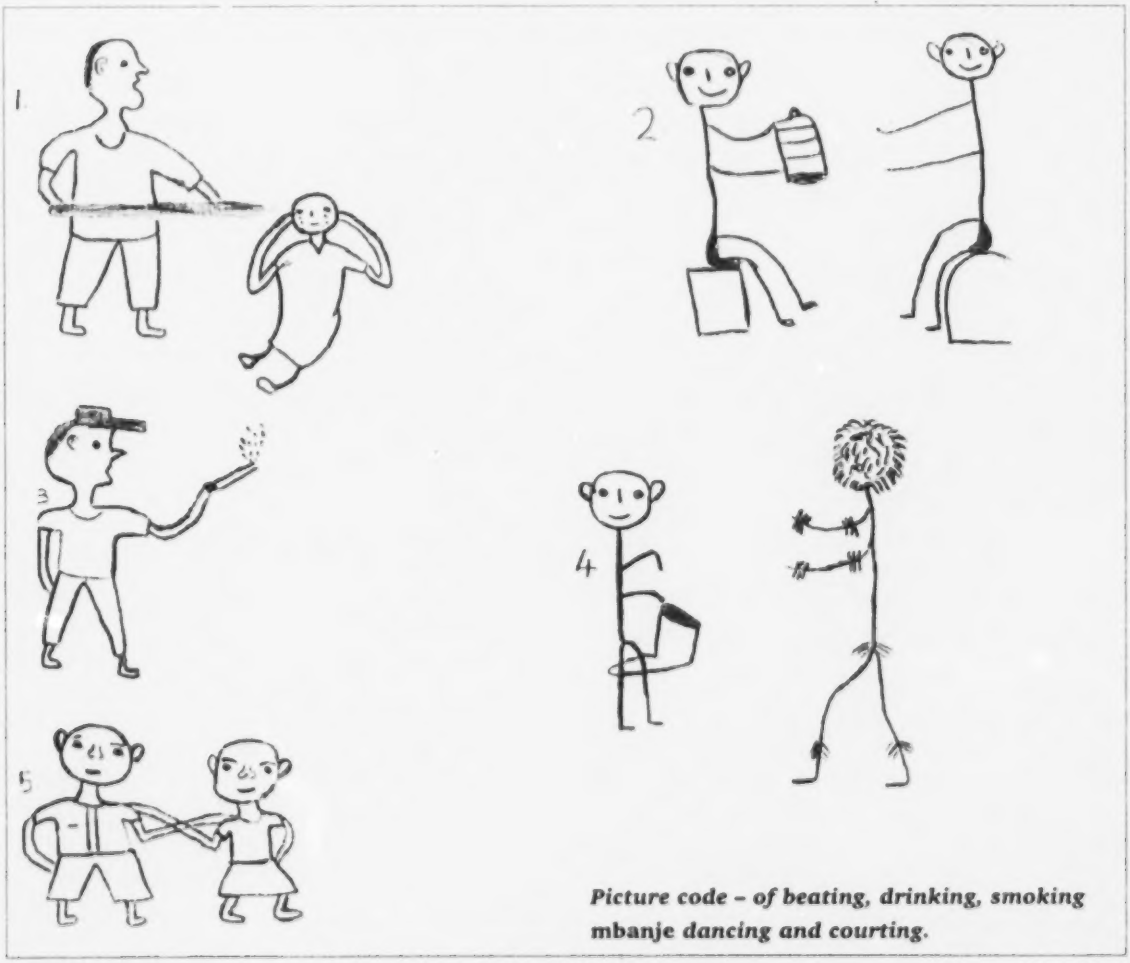


Children in tears at a* chinamwari *ceremony

The drawing above, was done by a group of girls who had undergone the *chinamwari* rites and would seem to indicate both fear and pain experienced at the hand of the ritual officiator.

Children, however, who did not want to undergo these rites, added that those who go for this training want to put into practice what they have learnt, and say the rites promote prostitution.

On most farms *Nyau* and *zvigure* dances (literally masked dances) are held. Comments made by the children in discussion indicate that



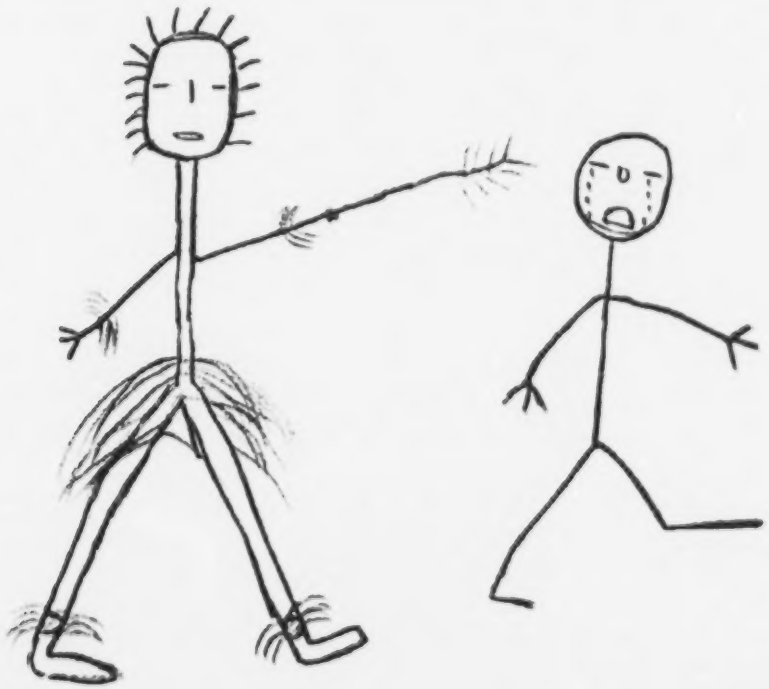
Picture code – of beating, drinking, smoking* mbanje *dancing and courting.

the former dance encourages promiscuous behaviour, while the latter engenders enormous fear. There is a considerable lack of clarity, however, about these dances. On some farms only the *zvigure* dance is known, and children on one farm depicted this dance as being part of the initiation rites, yet other children who have been through the initiation ceremony claim they are not allowed to watch the *zvigure* dances. Children on one farm said, 'The songs are vulgar. Some of the girls who sing for *zvigure* have love affairs with the men who dance, and end up in early marriages.' On another farm they commented: 'Some girls fall in love with the boys, others end up smoking *mbanje* (marihuana) and drinking beer.'

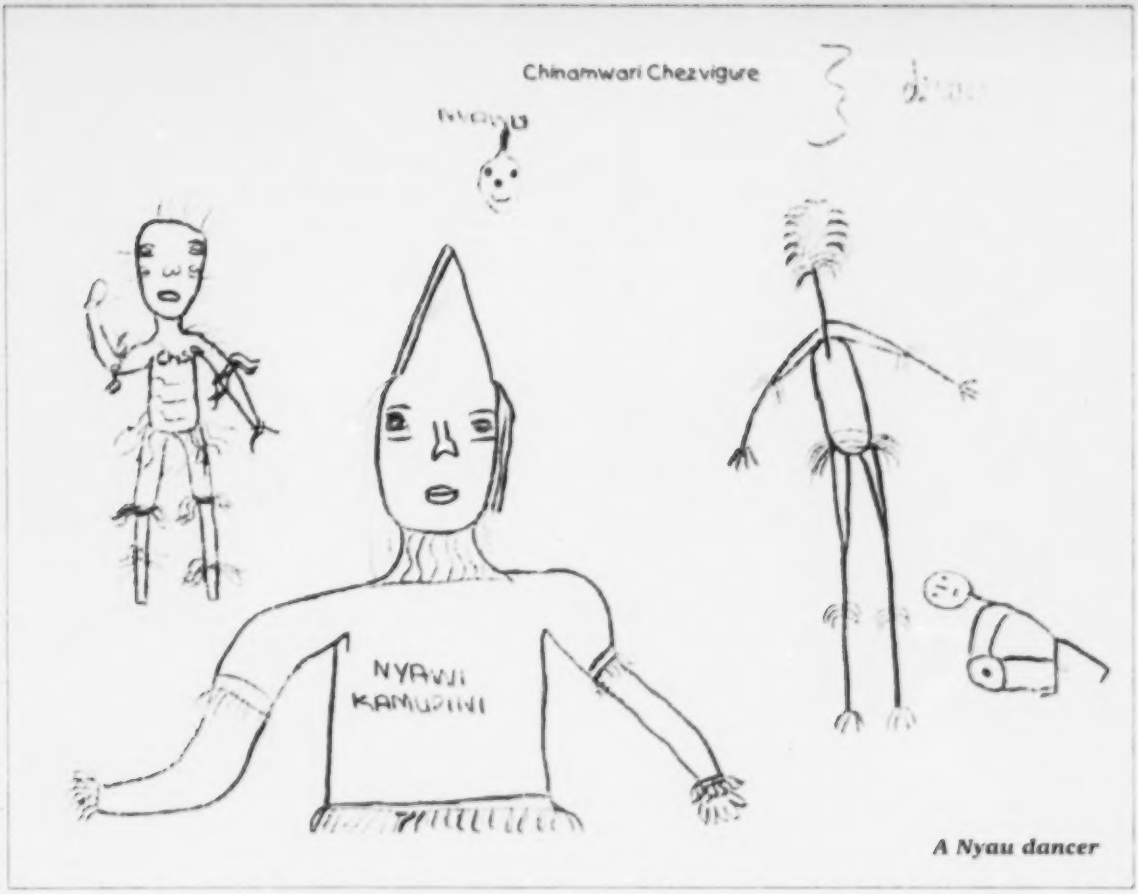
When listening to children on some farms the *nyau* and *zvigure* dances sound as though they may be different names for the same dance. The dance, however, which appears to be held just for entertainment on some farms, is linked to a strong belief in witchcraft on others. Where it revolves around a resident medium, it engenders enormous fear in the girls, as the medium is believed to have supernatural powers to have sex with whomsoever he wishes. Girls who are chosen to sing at these dances, and indeed are forced to sing and must continue to sing while boys dance (many naked), are sometimes not allowed to go back to school thereafter and once they have undertaken the practice regard themselves as responsible grown-ups.

But the effect of the practice on the children appeared strong, partly because secrecy is of paramount importance. 'If we talk about *zvigure* in class, we would be targeted by the *zvigure*. We don't know for sure who is behind the masks. We can only guess who they are from their legs, arms and body movement.' It also appears to be used as a form of discipline. Parents with unruly children can send them to *zvigure* where it seems they are literally beaten.

In comparison to the school population, the number of boys undertaking *zvigure* is very small (three out of 36 children in one class, and one out of 27 in another). In some schools, *zvigure* do not affect the life of the school because the sessions are held during the weekend. In others, the children involved miss school because they are too tired to attend the following morning. In one school, the children knew girls who had left school after learning the dances to support the



A zvigure beating a child



A Nyau dancer

Zvigure. However it is a practice that is unfamiliar to most teachers (*zvigure* is part of 'their culture'), who are reluctant to discuss it with the community elders.

Traditional rites of passage have both positive and negative implications on children's access to education. Because of the secretive nature of the practice, this is an area that needs careful handling over time. There will be a need to establish communication with the community elders in order to establish possible links of the *zvigure* to education.

Child Labour

SCF's position on child labour is based on Article 32 of the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child, which recognizes the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.[5]

This is echoed in the Zimbabwe Labour Relations Regulations of 1997, amended in 1999, which includes reference to the employment of Children and Young Persons. The legislation prohibits the employment of a child under the age of fifteen. It does, however, provide for a child who is thirteen or above to undertake light work, where such work:

- is an integral part of a course of education or training for which the school or training institution is primarily responsible.
- does not prejudice the child's education, health, safety, social or mental development.

In addition the legislation prescribes working hours and also prohibits any work that involves

[5] SCF Position Paper on Child Labour, 1997

contact with hazardous substances, electrically powered tools, extremes of heat and cold and night shifts.[6]

For most children in Zimbabwe work plays an important role in their lives. Traditionally children have always undertaken tasks at home or in productive activities. Status is attached to increased responsibility. In consequence, most rural families do not see such involvement in negative terms. Parents see work as a preparation for life; an opportunity to gain knowledge and skills; and as a normal part of growing up. For this reason a distinction was made in this study between paid and unpaid work.

Paid employment

Eighty-five children/youth were identified by their peers as currently working on the nine farms on which youth facilitators collected data. The following schedule gives an indication of the age of the children working; why they were working; and where.

Age	
Orphans	
aged 12-16	Boys and girls on five farms; girls within the farmers' houses, doing housework or baby-minding, boys on the lands doing light work, termed 'piece work'.
Children	
aged 13	Children who had reached the end of primary school, and have no access to a secondary school, work as casuals on five farms.
aged 12-14	Working on three farms at light duties, e.g. picking peas, during the holidays to earn money for school fees.
aged 15	A form one boy, employed part-time working in the lands, to help him care for ill parents and other family members.
14 years and above	Girls: employed as domestics, to enable them to care for siblings orphaned on six farms.
All ages	Boys at a golf course over the weekends – some make Z$60 a day, in one particular farming area.

Teachers interviewed confirmed that on four farms children between thirteen and sixteen, are able to do piece work. Some drop out of school to take up the opportunity. Many, on the other hand, had already dropped out of school and welcomed the chance to work. On another two farms no youth under seventeen were employed, regardless of whether they had left school or not. Only half of the boys who had left school after grade seven were employed, the others simply loitered in the village. They claimed to spend their days fishing, gambling and stealing. They maintained that they were looked down upon by those who were still at school and yet they were scornful of those still at school, seeing them as 'wasting their time'.

As has been observed (p.18) there is a correlation between distance to school and work on the farm, with the farms furthest away from schools having the highest number of youth working on them. Of the 85 children identified, 60 reside on four farms, two of which are ten kilometres from a school, while the other two have unregistered schools, which go no further than grades five and six.

Although most children employed are those who have no further access to schooling, school-going children on one farm maintain that they do piece work at the week-ends and during the holidays in order to earn school fees and to help their parents. The majority of children in paid employment, whether or not they were still attending school, claim to be working by choice and gave the following reasons for doing so:

- to get money to buy what they like – they admire people with beautiful clothes
- to help parents support large families and buy beer for their fathers
- because they do not have parents or guardians
- because their parents force them to work.

[6] Labour Regulations: Employment of Children and Young Persons Regulations, Harare, 1997

Children defend the right to work

DAKAR.

THIRD WORLD child labourers gathered here on Thursday to defend their rights in a press conference to work free from crimes of prostitution, slave-labour and drug trafficking.

Supported by non-governmental organisations the children, mostly aged 10 to 18, said they wished to work according to the "capacities and development" of each one of them.

While in industrialised countries child labour has been denounced and fought against for decades, several groups in developing countries defend the practice of child labour in certain circumstances.

Many argue that due to poverty and the difficulty for parents to send their children to school, the practice of child labour must be maintained.

About 50 young delegates, called to Dakar by the Enda-Third World Organisation to discuss their living conditions, reiterated their attachment to the "right to choose between working and not working".

The youngsters also said they wanted to represent themselves in international conferences, such as the next conference of the International Labour Organisation in Geneva.

— Ziana-AFP.

Some of the children working had this to say:

> *I am paid Z$600, like other workers on the farm, and besides looking after myself, I also use the money to buy groceries for my widowed mother in the rural areas.* (sixteen-year-old girl)
>
> *I must look after my three brothers, since our parents died, so I work for the foreman, looking after his children and get Z$200 for food.*
>
> *Some of us work during the holidays for money for school fees and uniforms. We are paid 30 cents per kg of cotton picked.*

Only on one farm did children claim to be forced by their parents to work, and these children were very unhappy, saying: 'We wish we could run away from our parents and go to school like other children. There is too little time to finish the piece work we are given. At the end of the day our bodies are sore, because the work is too hard.'

This attitude to work on the part of children is replicated in an SCF study in Mali, which records that two-thirds of the working children interviewed enjoyed their work, and another 25 per cent quite enjoyed it. Only a small minority (7 per cent) said they did not enjoy it at all.[7]

The following are the tasks generally undertaken by the children:

- baby-minding undertaken solely by girls, both for farm employees and farmers
- weeding and planting e.g. paprika, maize, tobacco, cotton (ranked second in terms of frequency)
- removing caterpillars from plants, and suckers from the maize
- picking cotton, oranges, paw-paws.

On three farms youth had been involved in putting fertilizer on the land, and two of them had also been employed to spray tobacco without any protective clothing. Discussions with the children as to the benefits of working, elicited not only positive responses such as having money for school fees, helping parents and buying clothes, but also revealed the children's perception of the negative consequences of earning money, such as:

> *Children drop out of school and will not be able to get better jobs later.*
>
> *Children end up drinking beer, smoking* mbanje *and gambling, because they have money.*
>
> *Children age faster because the work is strenuous and hard for children.*

On 5/9 farms the children maintained that the farmer did not know that they were working. The foreman took them on as a favour. And on two farms, he expected favours from the girls in return and deliberately sent them to weed in isolated spots where they were sexually assaulted.

[7] SCF Mali, 1998

On the farms visited, when the farmer is aware, he generally allocates light work to children, and these children insisted the farmers helped them a lot. Children from communal areas adjacent to the farms also work on the farms during the holidays, to raise money for school fees and uniforms. When the commercial farmer will not employ his farm children, they, in turn, go to the small-scale farmer in the communal areas to look for work, but are seldom paid what they could earn on the commercial farms. Most employed youth work the same hours as the adults, i.e. 6.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. on some farms, 6.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. on others, with a one to two-hour break at lunch-time. They also receive the same salaries as the adults.

The girls who mind children for farm employees or relatives of their families, however, do not work regular hours nor do they receive a regular salary.

Domestic Labour

Interestingly children did not identify tasks undertaken for the family as work. The PRA daily schedules done by the children, indicate quite clearly how hard the girls work in their own homes.

If they are at school they rise at 5.00 a.m. to complete various tasks before going to school, and on their return continue to do household chores until about 7.00 p.m. before they are free. If girls drop out of school, however, they will spend most of their day either working in the fields or doing housework and minding other children/siblings.

Six girls in the survey had been kept at home to care for siblings and to do domestic work. Boys who had dropped out of school, however, indicated that the bulk of their day is taken up with fishing, gambling, catching mice, collecting wild fruit and talking in the beerhall.

The girls were for the most part unaware of how hard they work each day, although they were conscious of the big discrepancy between the work demanded from boys, and from girls who drop out of school.

The daily schedules of boys at school, included tasks such as collecting firewood and water, as depicted in the photograph below.

Photographer: Kirstin Hacker

Unpaid or involuntary labour at school

Children, particularly girls, raised the issue of forced work at school as a reason for non-attendance. On most farms, but particularly where there is a school on the farm, the children talked with considerable feeling about being used as cheap labour by the teachers. On four farms the children claimed that they had to undertake washing, cleaning, chopping wood and other chores for the teachers, which they described as general work. Girls, who are chiefly affected, are required to do their laundry, do domestic chores and, in one particular case, look for greens to feed the teacher's rabbits. The boys on the other hand have to do manual work such as digging rubbish pits and chopping wood. Some of the resentment expressed could be attributed to the fact that they are seldom paid anything, but only given left-over food. They had left school as a result of this practice, describing it as discrimination.

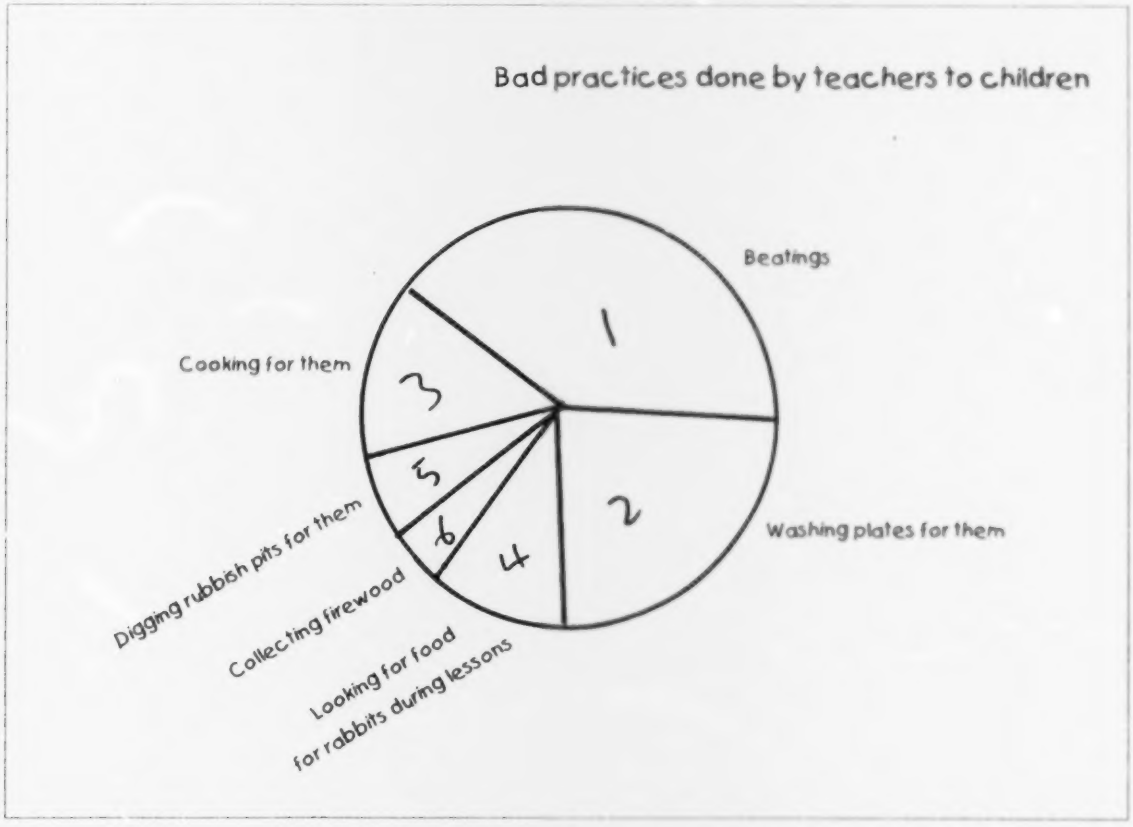
The wheel diagram below depicts their feelings about working for teachers.

Corporal punishment

Some of the children in the focus-group discussions indicated that it was the teachers who affected their ability to remain at school. Not only did they dislike having to work for the teachers, but boys at one school said that the teachers looked down upon them and treated them with disrespect. They described instances when the staff carried out periodic inspections for cleanliness and picked out individual children in front of the class.

> *Teachers should not tell us in pubic that we have not washed and are dirty. We do not mind being told, but it is not good in public. They should visit our homes and see where we come from.* (Homes in the farm villages do not have running water.)

Beating is another serious problem identified by the children. In all cases the children defined a 'bad' teacher as one who beats children, does not listen to explanations, and uses the stick for the smallest offence. One girl said, 'I know some teachers who beat children to make them



work harder, but beating is not right. Children will not come to school if they are beaten.' A comment that was heard on many occasions.

However beating is a complex issue that needs more discussion in both the farm community and in the schools. Officially it is only permissible under very strict conditions and in very particular circumstances for serious offences. However the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture is not practically able to monitor and enforce these restrictions. Many teachers are aware of the rules governing beatings and therefore tend to deny that they take place. Many resent the restrictions as it is a form of punishment which they themselves suffered, and which they believe is the only effective method of disciplining children. Thus beating is commonly practised, often for comparatively trivial offences, and equally often denied. Moreover frequently, although certainly not always, it is endorsed by the parents as a form of punishment, as many also beat their children. None the less beating is a fearful weapon which inhibits learning through discussion and exchange. It is also a punishment which acts as a disincentive and can cause children to drop out of school. As one teacher said after a focus-group discussion with the children, '*Mataura chii? Hamuna kutengesa here?*' (Have you sold us out?) Both parents and children were visibly intimidated.

Children's recommendations regarding the issues raised

As part of the study the children were asked for their recommendations about solutions to the problems they had raised. The following are some of their responses:

- the Department of Social Welfare, farmers and NGOs should help the children on farms.
- salaries for farmworkers should be increased.
- parents should be educated about the value of education and especially the importance of sending girls to school.
- children should be educated about the importance of school.
- there should be a law which deals with parents who force children to work on the farms.
- farm managers should not employ children under sixteen.
- there should be projects that help orphans.
- study groups should be formed on farms where there are no (secondary) schools.
- transport should be provided by the farmer where there is no school, and the roads should be fixed by government.
- teachers, who beat children, should be reported to the police; and they should be educated about child labour.

Section 4

The view of parents and teachers

Thirty-seven parents (17 males and 20 females) were interviewed about key issues raised by the children. Of these 25 were permanent workers, two were Farm Health Workers and three members of Farm Development Committees. Twelve were seasonal labourers. In addition nine teachers, including five headmasters, were also interviewed about various issues. The issue of the quality and relevance of education on commercial farms was discussed with this latter group in particular.

The teachers were asked initially to list and rank reasons for children's non-attendance at school. Most of the reasons given, were similar to those cited by the children. However, what they stressed as being the most important reason for non-attendance, was the lack of parental support and appreciation for and of education.

Other contributory issues raised, not mentioned by the children, included:

- a lack of role models,
- children forced to work during the school terms,
- parental loss of a job,
- labour migration.

What do you consider are the main problems faced by farmworkers' children.

- *Long distances to school when the children are hungry – a feeding programme is necessary.*
- *Most children do not have school uniforms.*
- *A good number of children come from broken homes hence their security and their concentration at school is greatly impaired.*
- *Parents are not keen to send girl children to school, often there is a sharp drop in enrolment after the girls reach grade four as witnessed by the following statistics in our school: grade two - 62 girls, grade three – 52, grade four – 41, grade five – 39, grade six 14, grade seven – 11.*

What do you consider are the main problems faced by farmworkers' children?

- *General malnutrition*
- *Coming to school unfed and dirty.*
- *Inadequate sanitary facililities or total absence of toilets.*
- *Inadequate health services.*
- *Lack of reading materials at home.*
- *Little or no help or support with homework at home as most parents are illiterate or semi-literate.*

In the main the headmasters attributed the lack of parental support to the limited educational background of most parents.

Of the parents interviewed, 8/37 did not attend school at all; 22 had seven or less years at school; and six had been to secondary school but only one of them had passed O-level.

Of these, 30 felt that their education had enabled them to get their current jobs; one young man, who had reached grade seven said: 'My grade seven education enabled me to do a course in animal husbandry and now I am in charge of the cattle on the farm.' A woman, who had only reached grade three maintained that her schooling had helped her to read and write properly, which is why she became the Farm Health Worker – a source of considerable pride. 'I can do my monthly reports for the team and the farmer.' On the other hand, 21 parents stressed that their education could not have helped them to achieve anything other than their manual jobs.

Generally speaking, however, the teachers felt that the lack of positive role models on the farm was a disincentive to children.

Parental mobility

It appears that there is still a relatively high rate of mobility among farmworkers, particularly among seasonal workers, which interrupts school attendance and causes children to drop out of school altogether. According to one headmaster, in spite of improved conditions and better salaries, which has led to a decrease in the number of seasonal workers on many farms, many such workers are still employed in certain types of farming, such as horticulture. Many seasonal workers stay on the same farm, but many others move at the end of every season. The children of these families are very disadvantaged. They may move from a farm with a school to one without; and then move back once again. They lose time, and the continuity and consistency of their education is lost. This can result in a loss of interest on their part.

Many seasonal workers are single parents, whose children have little chance of attending school, as there is seldom money for school fees or uniforms. A teacher at a well-staffed and equipped school, provided the team with a picture, which had been drawn by a group of seasonal workers' children, during a period when the farmworkers had been very fearful about the farm being designated. It depicts their anxiety about having to leave a farm with a school, to go and live as squatters in the bush.

School fees and uniforms

All parents interviewed stressed that the economic hardships they were currently experiencing, made it very difficult for them to pay school fees and buy uniforms. The majority felt very strongly that the government should be helping them, while some felt that the farmers should be providing free schools. Parents (22/37) felt that it was becoming increasingly difficult to manage the fees, saying that unless the child could work and assist in paying for the costs of their education they would have to leave school. In addition they felt that the need for uniforms should be stopped.

Why don't girls stay at school?

In response to the issue of the high drop-out rate of girls, or the non-attendance of girls at school, a group of parents listed the following as the major causes:

- early marriages and teenage pregnancies.
- a lack of motivation on the part of parents, which includes a cultural preference for sending boys to school.
- guardians who cannot or will not pay school fees for orphans.
- children who want to work on the farm to be independent.
- no adequate role model.
- the inability of parents to pay school fees.
- girls minding siblings at home.
- no schools on the farms.

It is interesting that the parents, although identifying issues similar to those of the children, ranked them very differently, placing early marriages and teenage pregnancies much higher in the order of importance.

Photographer: Kerstin Hacker

Children in class: no shoes and few uniforms.

Teachers similarly gave early marriages as one of the major reasons for girls dropping out of school. Regarding orphans, whose guardians cannot or will not pay school fees, parents and children saw this as an issue of equal significance. As the number of orphans is increasing daily, (due to the high incidence of HIV/AIDS) an inability or reluctance to pay the school fees for orphans has serious consequences.

Point of view: a headmaster

I have been teaching at this school for three years, and I have been headmaster for eighteen months. Before that I was teaching in a rural area. The difference between farms and the rural areas, is that people on farms don't have enough money to feed and support themselves.

However the responsible authority [the farmer] is actually supporting us a lot with education. At times he provides reading materials, he has electrified the classrooms and the teachers' houses, so the teachers are motivated. When we do sports, sometimes he gives us transport, and sometimes he chips in with funds to feed the pupils, or materials for school uniforms.

One of the main problems we find is hunger, especially towards the month end. The family will have exhausted their small salaries. So most of them come to school on an empty stomach. We once had a feeding programme for the pupils and it really assisted them. They were given nutritional porridge. Our attendance levels remained constant. There wasn't much absenteeism. Most of the children come from this farm only, we have a few from the two nearby farms, but they are over ten kilometres away.

School fees can also be a problem. In our case we had a meeting with parents last month and we decided to raise school fees because everything is going up. The fee used to be $2 a term, but next year we will make it $15 a term. We have agreed that the parents can pay it bit by bit at $5 a month.

But there are many problems. What we have discovered is that the main problem is the size of the family. They live in small houses, the lighting in the houses is poor, and the children don't get support from parents, to do homework for example. Another problem is the lack of recreational facilities. Most people spend their time unwisely: gambling, for example. And in my own experience I have witnessed children, girls, getting married at the age of thirteen or fourteen, as soon as they complete grade seven. I think it is the parents' choice. Their lives are ruined. You find a girl staying with her husband for a period of a year. The following year they are divorced. The husband is usually much older, five to ten years older. Mothers have no power to stop the girl child from getting into this situation.

A lot has to be done in educating people on the dangers of getting married too early.

Another factor is that they don't have role models in their society. Most of their relatives are working on the farm. So the professions they emulate are the storekeeper, the foreman, not anything else like an engineer. So we are trying to give a lot of information to the parents to say that education is very important. And now they have access to radio and to television, so they are gradually changing.

And I must say things are improving. Last year we had a 94 per cent pass rate at grade seven. Our best pupil scored six units.

Early marriages and teenage pregnancies

In subsequent discussions about early marriages, 23/27 parents admitted to forcing their daughters into early marriages:

- either indirectly through not sending them to school;
- or directly because of financial problems;
- or through not valuing education;
- or because of teenage pregnancies.

A number of parents qualified or explained their reasons or circumstances as follow:

- the family had insufficient money to enable all their children to go to school.
- the smallness of their homes, perhaps two bedrooms in all, made it impossible for families to have teenage girls and boys sharing the same room.

Other reasons given for early marriages included:

- few alternative female role models on the farm, other than the Farm Health Worker. (There are few female teachers on farms.)
- pressure from the farm community to conform.

Asked at what age girls marry, 19/37 parents said the girls were between twelve and sixteen years old, while others said fifteen to sixteen. This confirmed the information given by the girls themselves.

Parents confirmed that girls became pregnant to ensure marriage, and teachers interviewed agreed with these findings. When asked to what they attribute teenage pregnancies, a group of parents identified six key reasons, listed in the following order of importance:

- their lack of concern for the future.
- the children's desire to leave school.
- that there was no alternative future for girls.
- the culture of marrying early on farms.
- a lack of parental control.
- loose morals – 'the girls do not value themselves'.

Parents were quite open about the high 'divorce' rate (the children are never legally married) among young girls on farms, saying:

- they are immature, so they cannot handle family problems.
- they realize, after seeing the world, that choosing to marry was wrong.
- early divorces happen because of the girl's lack of experience.
- young people can't handle financial problems.

All the above appear to place the responsibility upon the shoulders of the children. However, 'adulthood' on the farms and in other rural areas is conferred upon children from a very much earlier age than in an urban or Western setting – poverty generally propelling children into adulthood at a very early age. Moreover, after initiation rites, children of ten are regarded as adults.

Cultural identity

There is a clear loss of cultural identity for many people on commercial farms. The Malawians, primarily through their initiation rites, appear to have passed on their cultural patterns and practices to their children to a greater degree than the other ethnic groupings.

Other adults when asked about cultural identity, said that there were no longer any elderly people to teach the children, and that inter-

marriage between all the groups on the farms was mixing the cultures.

Zimbabweans in particular appear to be confused about what is specifically Shona. There is a lot of inter-marriage and cultural patterns and rites of the Malawians and Mozambicans appear to have been adopted. For example, traditional patterns of marriage are changing rapidly and Shona children learn the traditional Malawi dances. Other more central values are changing too, as education and exposure to Western values, through the written word and through radio and TV, bring new perspectives and the need to adapt to survive in a changing society.

Cultural preferences

When parents (26/37: nineteen women and seven men), were asked directly why it was better to send boys rather than girls to school, they disagreed with the statement, saying, 'Both have a right to education.' Yet a number made the following comments:

> *Men traditionally look after women and children, so they need jobs that pay, so as to enable them to carry out their responsibilities, so they must go to school.*

Girls get married and leave their families. Sometimes thereafter they are not able to care for their parents, unlike the boys.

> *I struggled to send my two girls to school, and they let me down by falling pregnant, so I think it is better to send boys, rather than girls, to school.*

Child labour

Parents (29/37) admitted that their children worked on the farms. Most said that they worked during the holidays, while others said that when children were no longer at school, they worked full-time. Most said that their children had to work in order to assist the family and to pay school fees. They stressed that children who worked full-time were paid the minimum wage, while piece work was paid according to the job.

When asked whether the children could keep any of the money for their own needs, all the parents maintained that a small proportion is given to the child. It was discovered, however, that this pattern differed according to the gender of the child. Eight parents said that some girls are allowed to keep some of the money, while 23 parents confessed that boys retain their earnings: boys keep their money for beer, clothes, and radios, or it is kept for *roora* (bridewealth). One mother added that a boy can become violent if his money is misused. However, when asked specifically whether children who work in order to pay their school fees are allowed to use it for that purpose, 29/37 agreed that most parents permit this.

With regard to children working for teachers, some parents deemed it a favour to be sent to do work for a teacher, in spite of the fact that there was no direct benefit to child or family. Most, however, were not happy with the practice, citing their fear that girls were open to abuse by the teachers.

Homework

Children are given homework once or twice a week. Sometimes the teachers let them do this at school in the afternoon as they are often not allowed to take their textbooks away with them and as it is often difficult for them to do it at home. Their homework is generally done in cramped conditions in their kitchen or on their knees in the yard. The children are sometimes helped by their older siblings or relatives in the upper grades. As the parents told us, teachers did not seem to expect them to help with homework, apart from creating an environment in which children can work.

While it is true that some parents are illiterate and most have long working hours, many of those interviewed in the focus-group discussions emphasized that 'We are happy when our children bring homework. We encourage our children to do homework. If they don't, sometimes I beat them so they do it.' Another parent said, 'We want to support our children with school work so they can have four eyes. We have only two.' Some parents would like to see their children do homework every day. 'Bringing homework every day shows me the child has

been to school. Many children don't go and you cannot tell until the teacher comes to see you.' And 'homework should be given every day to give them chances to work and learn. Otherwise they will be playing most of the time.'

Point of view: four parents

KW: Nowadays if you haven't been to school, you are in trouble. If you go to school you will be free to do everything.

BK: If children are educated, their future will be better. We thank the farmer for building this school here. Our children now know a lot such as how to read and write, some are going to secondary school, and others are working.

EB: If you are not educated you won't find a job quickly. We thank our boss for giving us the opportunity to go to school, and for the building.

KW: There are some children who are not going to school because there is a shortage of money for school fees and clothes. This is due to the cost of living. Some parents can't afford to send their children to school.

At this school, we pay $7.50 a month, $22.50 a term. It is the only school which is charging just this small amount in the Glendale area.

BK: Some children are not going to school and the reason is that the money we are earning is very little, so we can't afford to pay school fees. We spend a lot of money on mealie-meal. It is very expensive now in Zimbabwe. You have to buy food, and afterwards there isn't any money left for the school fees, even though they are not high. We need food, we need body-building food, but as it is we can only afford mazze meal. And there are orphans on the farm, and they also don't come to school, because there is no one to pay school fees for them.

SCF: Is it not that all field workers are paid the same? Yet some send their children to school, and others do not. Are there any other reasons beside money that would account for this?

KW: You know people are different, some are clever and some are not. Some people know how to save money and some do not.

SCF: What do children do when they don't go to school?

BK: When children don't go to school, they are mischievous. Some play cards for money, others drink and smoke. But when a child is going to school, they will need time to study and to read books, so that the child won't end up drinking and smoking.

GW: And if they don't go to school, they don't respect elders. But if a child goes to school, they have knowledge and they will be taught good from bad. I think it is a good thing that we have a school on the farm.

BK: There are only a few children who are not going to school, about four or five of them. This is because their parents do not plan. There are even some single parents who are sending their children to school. They are managing.

SCF: Nowadays when children finish grade seven they are thirteen or fourteen, not very old. What do they do, if they don't go on to secondary school?

KW: On this farm, parents won't be able to send their children to secondary school. So when it is time to pick cotton, the children pick cotton.

SCF: So a child who has completed grade seven picks cotton, and a child who hasn't been to school, picks cotton and they are paid the same?

KW: Yes.

SCF: So what is the advantage of education?

KW: The thing about education is that you don't have to stop at grade seven. If you stop then, it is as if you are not educated. You have to go to secondary school, then do A-level, then do a course. Then you can do something which will get you a better job.

SCF: If you have done grade seven, do you think you will be a better parent?

KW: You will be a better, but not a good parent. You will not be like those who haven't been to school, but you will only know how to read and write and also you won't be able to find a job.

EB: The difference is that the one who is educated knows how to budget, and the one who is not educated will just spend their money on silly things.

KW: Some people will sit down and plan their family. Some will want three or four children and they have to make sure that they will be able to send them to school.

SCF: What kind of things would you want taught at schools? Schools follow the syllabus, but is there anything else which you think should be taught?

BK: I think children have to be taught English and mathematics. Even thought they are taught history, I think the most important subjects are English and mathematics. They need these subjects to get a job.

GW: I would like to add that children who are not able to go to secondary school, should be taught

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practical skills like woodwork and basket weaving. This will help them because education at primary level is not enough.

BK: I want to add something about those children who are not able to go ahead with school. If there was a factory which taught these children practical work, they could be more skilled. And the owner of the factory could pay them something every month. I don't think that picking cotton and weeding are good for their health.

KW: I think that is a good idea.

SCF: Do you have any children on the farm who have married when they are very young?

GW: We do come across such problems, the problems of children marrying before they are mature. It happens especially with children who cannot go on to secondary. They say, 'I can find a girl. I want her to be my wife.'

SCF: What do you think can be done about this? Do you think schools should teach family life education? Whose responsibility is it to teach children about health and about their bodies?

KW: Both of us are supposed to teach our children. They must learn at school, and they must learn when they are coming from school. When they are seated at home, you don't have to say, 'They have learnt at school, why should I teach them again.'

EB: When our children have finished grade seven, they don't go to secondary school, because it is far from here. Some girl children are not going because the school is too far away. ... Boys are going because they can run, and girls can't. When I was going to secondary school, it was far away, like from here to Glendale. We left home at seven in the morning, and we got home at six in the evening or if we played on the way home, it was after dark. When we were told to break for lunch, we just stayed at school, but the boys could run home to eat.

KW: It is better for the grade sevens to go to night school.

SCF: How are children disciplined at this school?

KW: Children who go to school have better manners than those who don't go to school.

SCF: Some parents we have spoken to don't want their children to do manual work at the school. What do you think?

KW: I think it is a good idea. The school usually has competitions when we might win uniforms. Also the teachers can sell the vegetables that are grown and they can use the money to buy stationery and pens.

BK: I think it is a good idea for children to work at school because they can get money to buy food they will need when they go to competitions and to shows. Gardening is also part of education because you will be learning about nutritious food.

SCF: How involved are the parents in the school? Do the parents and the teachers hold meetings together?

KW: It is a good idea because the parents and teachers can sit together and discuss problems. They can be of the same society.

SCF: Do the teachers live near the village, or in the village? Are they a part of the community?

KW: Some of them are part of the community. They belong to the FADCO (Farm Development Committee). They help our old people and the orphans.

EB: I live here and I often visit the compound to see people there. Our relationship with them is good. If we have problems here, we will go to them and they will help us if they can.

Even when people in the compound have problems, they come here and we can help them. When the headmaster has a problem at school – perhaps a sick child – he will run to the compound and tell people there. The school garden helps when the child becomes sick, as the money from the vegetables can be used to send the child to the clinic. When the parent comes back from the fields, everything will be done.

SCF: Before we conclude, can you each think of one or two things, which might improve education in the school, or your life in the village.

GW: We want to live nicely, work nicely and we want a good relationship between the employer and the employee. Problems are everywhere. It might be the employer or the employee and they must be able to help one another.

KW: I want to add that we have to have unity. If I have done something wrong, my boss must tell me, and if he has done the same, I must speak out. We have done many good things together like building a school, and we must go on working together.

BK: As has been mentioned at this farm we work nicely with the murungu *and that whether you are white or black you have problems. But now I as a health worker, I play with children under five, and in this coming rainy season, we must have shelter so that the children are not rained upon.*

EB: I also think that unity is important, unity between teachers and parents, and also with the whites.

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Parental involvement in the schools

This varies very much from school to school and farm to farm. However one of the three schools visited for focus-group discussions had a school/parent committee. Members of these committees have meetings at least three times a term at the school and this helps its members to develop and generate interest in the school.

> *We are planning to build more houses for teachers. Several of them live in one house and it is not good. This is why they do not want to remain here for a long time. We are talking to the farm owners from the surrounding farms to help us.*

The parents and teachers at one school agreed that when projects are organized for the benefit of the children, and when parents are involved in planning the activity and have been given adequate information about the contribution that they can make, they will participate.

> *We planned to make the school garden, and to build Blair toilets. We dug the pits, but did not have enough money for the cement.*

The parents on the school committees were not happy about the lack of involvement shown by the majority of parents.

> *We are not happy about others not coming for meetings. We should work together to support the school. It is good to have a school.*

One headmaster said,

> *'It was a major task to convince people that there was a need to work together and build classrooms. It was resisted by many people. We succeeded but with difficulty.*

Another said,

> *I joined the farm school in 1995. I have taught grades five, six and seven. I was given a house with no electricity. The rooms were very small and the doors were not secure. The working life was however pleasant. There was a lot to learn from the children, parents and the community at large.*

A third contributed,

> *I have worked as a teacher on a farm school for five years. I have noticed that parents are very much interested in having their children attend school. The prohibitive factor is money.*

In the two other schools, there seemed to be little meaningful contact between the school and the community – even though in one case, the school is visible from the community.

Parents, however, are generally invited to their school once a year on parents' day when guests are also invited from the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, local government (the district council), and farms. The dignitaries are given a conducted tour of the school before

Photograph: Irene McCartney

Mothers enjoying Speech Day at their children's school

being entertained with performances of drama, music and traditional dances after the prize-giving and speeches. On these occasions, parents do not have the opportunity to talk to teachers or see their children's class work.

The teachers at one school suggested that the parents would not come unless they provided food. At another school parents at the focus-group said that most people came primarily to eat, but even then few people made the effort.

Possibly this is because the only other occasions when parents are called to schools is when they receive an official note reminding them that they have not paid school fees, or that their children have no uniform, or that they have done something wrong. Sometimes they go to the school to negotiate for more time to pay fees or to buy uniforms: 'My mother came to ask the headmaster to let me come to school before they bought my uniform.'

Thus many parents do not regard schools as friendly places, but ones associated with their inability to provide adequately for their children.

The children were generally in agreement that when their parents show interest in their school life, they tend to work harder. 'I want my parents to come to school often because this will encourage me to work harder all the time.'

Photographer: Kerstin Hacker

Children at play

Section 5

The quality and relevance of education on commercial farms

There are many issues that effect the quality of education children receive. Weaknesses in the system disadvantage children. Children who do not achieve a measure of success will be unable to make choices affecting their future lives. This is particularly true of children at farm schools who suffer so many other disadvantages.

We will look now at some of the interrelated issues that effect the quality of educational provision. They include:

- the suitability of the teaching venue.
- the relationship between the school and the responsible authority.
- the availability of textbooks and library books.

Photograph courtesy of Commercial Farmers Union (CFU)

Children playing netball – poor recreational facilities

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- the low *per capita* grant and access to alternative funding.
- the ratio of children to teacher.
- the relationship between the teacher and the children.
- the relationship between the teacher and the parents.
- the suitability of the curriculum.

Farm schools – buildings and facilities

When a school is unregistered, the condition of the buildings and other facilities depends on the goodwill of the farmer. This to some extent is affected by their relationship with the headmaster and the community and their relationship with each other.

Farm schools are very often:

- renovated tobacco barns or sheds, which usually have no more than two rooms.
- premises shared with the beer hall: the school having the building by day and the beer hall patrons occupying it at night.
- houses once occupied by farm assistants.
- newly built and well-ventilated buildings with at least one classroom for every grade and other facilities such as a hall, playing fields, etc.

Some schools are fenced, preventing animals from entering and destroying the school gardens, others are not.

Most schools have a field for playing soccer but many have few other recreational facilities.

An additional problem at unregistered schools is sanitation. There are rarely adequate toilets for the number of children at the school. All the schools which we visited, however, had at least one water point, which also provided water for the school orchard and garden. In one school most of the buildings, including the staff houses, were in a state of disrepair, and needed urgent attention.

There is also an enormous variation in the type and quality of school furniture and other materials used by the schools. Some school premises have extremely poor furnishings, consisting mainly of wooden planks supported on bricks or brick and mud-moulded seats and tables. On the other hand many of the schools are adequately equipped with desks, benches, blackboards, cupboards and other necessary furniture. Schools (4/9) surveyed were well equipped, with one of the schools also having a well-stocked library. Eighty per cent of unregistered schools, however, need more classrooms, while 40 per cent need additional furniture.

Our classrooms can only accommodate about 25 children, but because we need more classrooms, there are about 45-50 children in each classroom. Three children sit at one desk. Two classes share a classroom with in an area of about eight metres by four metres.

An average classroom in our school comprises about 45 children who share nine benches and five tables.

Teachers' accommodation

Not very many schools whether registered or unregistered provide adequate accommodation for the teachers. This is a major problem in attracting and keeping good staff at farm schools. If the teachers live in the nearest town, where there is electricity and water, they often have to travel at least twenty kilometres to and from the school every day, and in areas where there are few if any buses, and where the roads are bad, particularly during the rainy season. This gives rise to absentseeism and the teachers arriving late or leaving early due to the constraints of travel. Teachers moreover don't want to live in remote areas where there are no shops or recreational facilities nearby.

There are teacher's houses, less than 500 metres from the school with free electricity and water. A house is one small room with a shared kitchen. There is no garden.

Operating as a teacher, I have found the place to be good, but I have to counter everyday challenges. The best food and services are obtainable sixty kilometres away. There is a lack

of entertainment which brings boredom. Newspapers do not reach us.

Each house has four rooms with electricity. The water source is a borehole and the teachers have gardens near the houses. However because there are not enough houses the teachers have to share. The gardens cannot be fully utilized, as the water source is unreliable.

Quality of education: teaching

The quality of education that children receive in many schools on commercial farms is arguably of as much concern as the limited number of schools in these areas. The government's intention to have a primary school within five kilometres, and a secondary school within eleven kilometres, of every child's home has never been applied to the commercial farming areas. Thus only 42 per cent of the primary schools in the commercial farming areas are registered schools, the rest are entirely funded and run by the farmers themselves. This has particular significance for the quality of education received by the children, as many teachers in the unregistered schools lack adequate qualifications and training. On the other hand it is often said that untrained teachers work harder and with more commitment because they know they will not find alternative employment.

In the country as a whole, the high pupil to teacher ratios and the low proportion of trained teachers, partially account for the fall in the quality of education.[1] Registered schools on commercial farms are those that meet government specifications in terms of buildings and other facilities and have teachers who are employed and supervised by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture. The majority of these are trained and appropriately qualified. There are, however, untrained teachers in registered schools on commercial farms, as was shown in a recent study undertaken in the Zvimba area in Mashonaland West, where only 64 per cent of the teachers in ten schools were trained.[2]

As we have said before, (see p.10) many farmers are reluctant to register their schools, as there is still no consultative mechanism which would ensure that issues such as staffing or buildings could be discussed by the farmer and government personnel.

Status of farm schools in the study: registered and unregistered schools

Of the seventeen schools attended by the children in this study, nine were registered schools and eight unregistered. All the unregistered schools had unqualified teachers. Most grade one to five schools having only two to three teachers; and those with only grades one to three having just one teacher. The unregistered schools that went up to grade seven had between five and nine teachers, with two having a teacher per class and a non-teaching headmaster. The registered schools with seven grades had between nine and ten trained teachers, and one also had two untrained teachers. This school has hot-seating with two grades sharing one classroom.

In the smaller schools, the average number of children per class was twelve, with larger numbers in the lower grades. In the larger schools the number of children per class ranged from eleven to 81, with the lowest grades having the highest number of pupils. As often happens in farm schools, a number of grades were combined in a single room, making the average pupil teacher ratio 40:1.

As unqualified teachers quite often lack teaching skills and know little about appropriate teaching methods and techniques, this practice seriously compromises the education the children receive. It is, for example, extremely difficult for the teachers to follow the syllabus for each grade in such a situation. In consequence children who reach grade seven at an unregistered school are required to sit their grade seven exams at a registered school. Many of these children fail to reach the required standard. Some of the

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1 Dorsey et al, 1991

2 Mugabe, 1997

untrained teachers interviewed attested to the difficulties they experience in trying to teach 40 to 50 children, from three or four grades, in the same room. As one of them said, 'All I can do is set work for the children, but as there is only one textbook for every ten children in the class, not all the children are able to do the work.' Another said, 'Because I can only spend a little time with each grade every day, I am not able to cover the curriculum.'

On the other hand five teachers at unregistered schools expressed satisfaction at being able to manage, although all but one expressed the need for in-service training and monitoring visits from the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, which they do not receive. Two maintained that they were able to teach all the subjects in the curriculum; while two other grade seven teachers at registered schools admitted that they only concentrated on teaching the four examination subjects, as incentives are given to schools with good pass rates in these subjects.

Point of view: teacher at a registered school

When I first came to this school, I thought I was never going to stay in such a place for a long time. Since it was my first time experiencing farm life, I realized I had much to learn. Farm life was really very different from town life.

When I first met the children I faced some problems. The first was communication. I couldn't understand some of the things they said. Since most of them are not Shonas by origin, they could not speak fluent Shona. I tried to be much closer to them, so that I could get used to them. It only took me about a month to get used to their way of talking.

I also noticed that their standard of behaviour was below average. They had no respect for each other or for the elders. The main reason was that they spent most of their time on their own. Their parents were at work. I found I had a great task before me. So now and then I would counsel the children. Today there is a bit of a change.

In the classroom there was a lot to do to help the children. There was a shortage of textbooks, classrooms and furniture. I had to make do with what was available. At first I found it very difficult to teach outside under a tree. But I am now used to the situation.

Though things are still tough, I am now accustomed to it. My wish is to help the children, so that they can have a better future.

Teaching: qualified and unqualified teachers

The majority of headmasters at registered schools had passed their O-levels and were qualified to teach, but not all headmasters at unregistered schools were either qualified or trained. Some were teachers who had been teaching for many years, and who were respected and trusted by their employers. Similarly many of the untrained teachers at unregistered farm schools were only educated to form three or four. On one farm the headmaster and deputy head of an unregistered school had been born and educated on the farm.

The quality of teaching that the children receive is also affected by the classroom behaviour of teachers. For example we heard comments such as: 'Some teachers talk to other teachers when they are supposed to be teaching us and only start teaching when the bell for break or lunch goes.' And, 'Teachers laze and smoke in class.'

The quality of teaching was also linked to gender in two schools with the children saying: 'The teachers are bad, particularly the male teachers. But the elderly headmaster is good.' And, 'Only the female teachers are interesting and help us to understand our work.'

Even at registered schools there were teachers who were unqualified to teach certain subjects, such as home economics and agriculture. According to the headmasters, schools on commercial farms have difficulty in attracting qualified teachers because of the isolation of the farms and the size and quality of the teachers' houses.

Children in an unregistered school complained that they did not like English, because 'the

Photographer: Kerstin Hacker

Tree planting

teacher ended up mixing Shona and English' and added that they loved woodwork and sewing, but the teachers don't appreciate these subjects, so 'we don't do much practical work'. On the other hand in another unregistered school the children claimed to love the English language classes and always got good passes, because the teacher is so good. They also liked forestry because the farmer gives us trees and our teacher shows us how to look after them.

Discussions with headmasters and teachers highlighted an interesting issue regarding the quality of teaching in registered and unregistered schools. It seems that trained teachers from neighbouring registered schools often look down on untrained teachers, and in one case even tried to persuade parents that the education at the unregistered school was not worthwhile. This demotivated the students and made them feel bad about their school. The students at one school said that they had come to despise the teachers who had been downgraded by their colleagues. On the other hand, students at another school, interviewed about the difference between trained and untrained teachers, had this to say: 'Untrained teachers are more dedicated to their work than trained teachers.'

Point of view: headmaster at an unregistered school

As a farm school teacher, I really enjoy my job. I have been thirteen years working on the farm as a teacher.

The advantages are that I have free accommodation with electricity, water and firewood. I have three children who are doing their education on the farm and their school fees are very low comparing them with government or registered schools. My employer is very kind and helpful. She pays fees every year for secondary children who come out with good results. (Nearly three-quarters of all our grade seven children go on to secondary school.) In town things are difficult, people are struggling to pay for transport, rent and other expensive things like school fees.

The only disadvantage is that I cannot upgrade myself due to my low salary. I am very eager to upgrade myself, but because of not having enough money, I can't do it.

There is unfairness in the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture. You see all farm teachers are unqualified. In the first place, a person knowing that he can't teach in the Ministry, goes to a farm looking for a teaching post. Maybe the farm owner won't at first agree. Then after a long discussion, he might start teaching with a grade one class. He might be teaching in the open ground or in a beerhall.

As time goes by, school blocks will be built, and five or six more teachers will be employed. Then you see the Ministry coming in. They take over the school and provide their own teachers. The former teachers are then laughed at and mocked, 'these unqualified teachers are spoiling children' they say. And the teachers are just thrown away like rotten cabbages.

In my opinion this is very, very unfair. I think the Ministry must look at this problem. They must try by all means to help these unqualified teachers upgrade themselves.

Clearly the difference between trained and untrained teachers is more complex than one of certification. It would be a mistake to think that untrained teachers do not show commitment and dedication simply by virtue of not having a teaching diploma, or vice versa.

On two farms in Mount Darwin and Centenary the headmasters maintained that the children received a very good education at schools on commercial farms. Both stressed that the buildings and facilities were better than those at registered schools in the adjacent communal areas, due to the consistent support of the farmers. At one school the headmaster was proud to tell us that an ex-pupil now had a commerce degree and currently works for the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, while another former student was doing A-levels. A number of headmasters listed as their greatest achievement, the high grade seven pass rate:

> *We produced our best grade seven results in 1998. There was a one hundred per cent pass rate.*
>
> *Our school's greatest achievement has been in our academic results, as well as sporting activities in our zone.*

Point of view: a farmer's wife

SCF: Can you tell me a little bit about how you started the school on your farm?

FW: We started the school on our farm, maybe twenty years ago, after independence. I don't remember if we built all the classrooms at once. But one of the reasons why we are not registered is because we didn't build the school to the registered specifications, and so the size of the windows and classrooms weren't what was required. Since then we have been glad to be independent and not have any ties with the Ministry.

The school does cost us a lot of money and probably it would be better to have help from government, but we have just carried on. The farmworkers have their own community and the school is helpful to a certain extent in serving that community, although obviously the teachers are not qualified. One could get more involved, but when my husband died, we had to start again from scratch. So we have just supported the headmaster and staff rather than getting really involved.

SCF: What do you do about books and other materials?

FW: At the beginning of each year the headmaster gives me a list of what they require and I order them. At the annual prize-giving, I also give books as prizes.

The grade sevens go to Glendale to Tumbubwi to write their grade seven exam. I now sponsor the children with the best results and pay their high school fees. A few weeks ago, these children complained that they were short of books, so I bought some for them as well.

It is expensive, very expensive. But we have built up our stock over the years, so unless a new title is required, we can draw on what we have. The school costs money – we pay the teachers and everything. But we have a friend who is a headmaster, and I have seen a different side of schooling through him. So I have tried to lift the teachers and the headmasters above the salaries of just the ordinary boss boys, and take into account their responsibilities. But within the framework of the farm budgeting, it is quite difficult because the school is just an expense. Perhaps if there ever was a shortage of labour it might pay to have a school, but I don't really think like that. I think of the school as helping my workers and pupils.

SCF: How do you recruit the teachers, do you advertise?

FW: No. You get lots of people coming round wanting positions. At one stage we thought we ought to test them? So we decided that the use of English was really important because if they weren't very good at it, they weren't going to be able to teach the syllabuses and help the pupils answer the questions, because they are not qualified teachers by any means; perhaps some have got O-levels. So they had to write an essay and the teachers were chosen on the best essay, the best English and the best writing. But latterly I have left the selection to the headmaster. He chooses the teachers that he thinks he can work with, those who have the interests of the children at heart.

SCF: Do you provide the teachers with accommodation?

FW: Oh yes– but within the last five years. We have built houses at the school. We got Durawall in and we put electricity into the houses. They live quite close to the school with their families. I have lots of workers, some permanent and some contract, and not everyone has got a brick house or a Durawall house. But every couple of years when we feel we can manage it, we build some more houses and put in electricity.

SCF: When the children finish school, do they stay on the farm?

FW: Some go on to secondary school. Last year was the first year that we had some students who actually wrote O-levels. So I suppose this is the fifth year that I have been sponsoring them. I have probably about fourteen sponsored children. Some stay on the farm, some go and look for something more exciting in town. They probably come back to the farm if they don't find anything else.

SCF: One of the disincentives for children continuing with education, or for parents sending their children to school, is that if they work on the farm after they have completed their grade seven or ZJC, there is not any distinction in terms of pay. I just wondered if you saw any benefit in terms of recruiting people who have some education?

FW: Well, I think the change of wage structure, the introduction of a minimum wage at independence is what sort of changed everything. After that someone who had worked for ten years and someone who had just started got the same wage. That was not really fair in both the workers' and our eyes: not fair. But that was how we carried on. Within my own family, I have a son who has a degree, and a son who doesn't and they are paid the same. It doesn't seem to make much difference if you have got education.

As far as the workers and schoolchildren are concerned, their education will show through. I mean if they can speak English and read – increasingly the workers are dealing with things that require them to read – they will probably rise to being supervisors or put in charge of various gangs like spraying or calibrations of machines. I have workers who have been on this farm for several generations and the older ones still put a cross if they sign for their wages. When everyone can actually sign their name, I will feel I have definitely made some progress.

I would say, and I am sure my headmaster would agree, that we want a library, or a library-cum-pre-school, and we intend to build one. I have lots of my own children's books, and I would love help in stocking a library, but I would do it without being a registered school.

There are two areas, health and education, which really concern us, and in my own small way I am attending to them. It is a cost to the farm but, yes, for the foreseeable future that is how we will continue.

SCF: Many farms don't have farm schools. If somebody said to you, 'I don't have a school on my farm. How should I go about it?' or, 'Do you think it is a good idea to have a school?' what would you say to them?

FW: Well, I would definitely say it was a good idea. Probably I would recommend, that they become registered, because I don't think many people would pay for everything as we do. We used to take pupils from other farms but I stopped this. Well, I was subsidising their children and if we were paying for the school it seemed that the school should be for our workers and our children.

SCF: Increasingly it seems that farmers are clustering together, as with Foothills, and building a really big school. Do you think this is a good idea?

FW: It probably is a good idea, but at the same time we are quite independent. Our school recently won a cup at another school's event. So I took the trophy and had it engraved. We are all really quite proud of our school. We all enjoyed the celebration. We are sporty ourselves and probably quite competitive and so this probably comes through. If it was a community school, somehow it would not be the same.

SCF: What recreational activities are there at the school?

FW: Well, they play netball and there is a soccer field that the farm team plays on. There are climbers and swings at the pre-school. They also do physical education.

And there is a little speech and drama. It sometimes lacks imagination. But it is really quite good. We also have a lot of drama groups coming to the farms, talking about AIDS and various things like that, sometimes you get a bit tired of them. But I only get involved at the end of the year at the prize-giving.

When I first came on to the farm, I taught the wives of the workers. We played netball together and I got physically involved. I was not long out of school, and I enjoyed it. I also taught homecraft. But then I had my family. Now I am so involved in keeping my finger on the pulse of the farm that I am no longer so involved. It could be a full-time job, especially now that we have two schools. What I think I do is provide support. As a family, we are very possessive about the farm and our workers and we are proud of the school.

SCF: Is the school used for extra-curricula activities such as homecraft clubs or adult literacy classes?

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FW: Well, we do have adult literacy classes and we do have a woman teaching needlework, but I am not exactly sure where this is done – in their houses or in the classrooms. The teachers' houses have got electricity and there are security lights around the school, but there are no lights in the classrooms. I think they gather in houses, I don't really know. Perhaps it is very bad of me not to know.

SCF: At prize-giving, do the parents come?

FW: Yes, some of them do. But the headmaster always asks me to provide beer and food and so on, as an additional incentive. They come in dribs and drabs, but they do come, and when their children get prizes, they sort of rush up and ululate and give them a five dollar note or something.

SCF: Another problem we have come across is the lack of parental involvement in the schools, partly because many parents are not educated, partly because they work such long hours, partly because they sometimes feel looked down upon by the teachers. So the question is how do we involve the parents in the school?

FW: I have not really given it much thought. There is a FADCO committee. But, I must admit that lots of the things you are saying I had not really thought about. I had just let them carry on.

SCF: Can you think of anything else you would like to say about the value of education on the farm? or the school?

FW: I think it is really important to be educated. The two children, the first ones from our farm school that we sponsored to high school wrote O-level last year, the one got two subjects and the other one passed one. That would be my ideal, to have pupils from both our two junior schools go on to high school and then come out with full five O-levels. Then I would feel that we had reached a decent sort of standard.

SCF: Very often the workers houses are so small that children have real problems doing their homework; and they don't have books.

FW: That is definitely right, yes. We should probably put electricity in all the houses and the school, but all these sort of things cost money.

I have very good relations with the teachers at Amandas because our children went there. And we have had teachers from there coming to our school and giving me a run-down on how the teaching is going and making recommendations. Plus, more recently, their music staff came and helped our staff and taught them a few different songs, because they always seemed to sing the same songs.

SCF: Which secondary school do the children go to?

FW: Well, I sponsor them to Rujeko Secondary School in Glendale. I am not sure how good it is, but that is where they were going, anyway. It is a long way for them to walk. But you know there are tractors going backwards and forwards, we don't say, 'Right, we are going to Glendale now. Do you want a lift?' but there are lots of vehicles going backwards and forwards, and I quite often bring them back from school. They basically have to get there on their own.

SCF: One of the things that non-registered teachers say is that the qualified teachers at registered schools tend to look down on them because they do not have the right qualifications. They feel they work hard with a lot of commitment but that they are receiving a salary which is probably five or six times lower than those given in the registered schools? What can be done about this?

FW: I don't really know except that during the last holidays there were courses held in Bindura by the Ministry to which my teachers went. They were taught about how to go through a syllabus, and how to put it across and it was a bit of training, for them. I think it was a good thing and the teachers got a certificate when they had finished. And it was followed up by a short visit by two members of the Ministry who had been involved in organizing it. It was really amazing how enthusiastic the teachers were when they came back from that course. So I think more workshops would be a good thing. They also seemed to be given quite a lot of books and charts and things like that to use. Some of them are studying a little bit on their own. I think if they can have these sort of things organized for them, they can become better teachers.

SCF: Maybe you could sponsor them to do their O-levels by correspondence, so that they can upgrade their qualifications. Many unregistered teachers can't possibly manage to pay for a course at a correspondence college, as their salaries are low.

FW: That's a point. I hadn't really thought about the teachers. I am not sure what qualifications our most recent teachers have, but it is certainly something to think about. And then we do have a prize for the most improved teacher. The headmaster judges it. And I give them books as well.

SCF: Do you think it would be a good idea to have some kind of a workshop with the teachers and the farmers' wives – because it is usually the wives who are more involved in the schools?

FW: Yes, I am sure it would be. But I am not sure how many people would actually get involved. I went to

the launch of the Farm Community Trust and I was surprised at how many fellow farmers' wives were not there, perhaps they weren't invited. So, in answer to your question, I am sure it would be a good thing to do but probably one of us would really have to try to get them involved.

Funding: text and library books

Schools follow the national curriculum in which the main subjects taught are English, maths, social studies, Shona and content (a combination of subjects including history, geography, environmental science, and religious and moral education). Registered schools can expect an annual *per capita* grant from the government for material, while funds for the maintenance of buildings have to be met by the development levy paid by the parents. The *per capita* grant of approximately $27 per child has, however, remained the same since 1980. Its value has been almost totally eroded by devaluation and inflation. In practise this means that in 1980, ZS27 might have bought one book between two children, but in 1999 it buys one book between eight children. Not until the Dutch Aid Scheme for disadvantaged schools was initiated in 1998, was the *per capita* grant increased. In the meantime a school's resources in terms of books and materials had often been reduced to almost nothing.

In unregistered schools, books are bought from funds provided by the responsible authority plus what money is acquired from school fees. In one of three schools visited during the follow-up research, one school had a maize field, another a garden to raise extra income for books. In another the parents had also started a garden for fundraising purposes.

The availability of good learning materials is vital to successful primary education according to the National Programme of Action for Children (NPA).[3] In 1990 only 40 per cent of schools had achieved a ratio of one textbook for every four pupils and only 5 per cent of schools had a functioning library. Only 60 per cent of schools had a chalkboard in every classroom and sufficient chairs and desks for all pupils and teachers. Only two farm schools had adequate books for the children, one was registered and one unregistered, and the registered school was in this situation due to the interest of the farmer who purchased the books himself. In the other schools there was a general shortage of books, with some schools having as many as six to ten children sharing a single book. In one school there were no books at all and the children were dependent on the teacher for their notes. History was one of the subjects for which there were few or no textbooks. One child in grade four said, 'In our class twelve children share one book, therefore some of us do not have the chance to read at all,' while another young grade three girl said, 'There are few books at our school. Each group is given one book. Some classes do not have reading books at all.'

In the schools visited by the SCF follow-up team, there was an average of one textbook for every six pupils for English, Shona and maths. For other subjects the ratio was 1:11. However, efforts are made to provide adequate books for the grade seven examination class where the average ratio is 1:3 for English and maths and 1:4 for other subjects.

In order to maintain books as long as possible, all the books are covered in plastic. A negative consequence of this careful maintenance is that children are often not allowed to take books home to do their homework. The teachers write the assignments on the board and discuss them in class before the children go home. This limits the capacity of the pupils to work independently

For other teaching materials such as maps, pictures, charts, the teachers have to make their own. On display in the headmaster's office in one school, and in one classroom in another, for example, were maps, multiplication tables, drawings from Bible stories and teaching cards for infant classes. These were made by both the teachers and the pupils. In two of the schools, the teachers organize in-service training courses in making teaching materials, such as charts and tables. The more experienced teachers become

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[3] GOZ, 1992: UNICEF, 1994

the resource persons at these workshops. In one school, there were classrooms with no teaching aids on the walls.

All three schools visited had some form of library. In one, the library was new and the books were still in their carton unused and inaccessible to the children. In another, the books were in a storeroom and the children requested them through their class teacher. In the third, the books were in the headmasters' office. In the better organized school, the children read one library book per term. All the library books had been donated.

Language and education

Many children at farm schools speak a mixture of Shona and Chikunda (from Mozambique) or a mixture of Shona and Chichewa (from Malawi) at home. At school most of the teaching is done in a mixture of Shona and English. The teachers said it was important for the children to learn to read and write in standard Shona.

During the focus-group discussions, the teachers and children at two schools were asked what they felt about learning to read and write a language they did not speak at home. Most of the children seemed to favour learning to read and write Shona: 'It is the language we speak. We are used to it and it is easy.' However the teachers indicated that when the children are writing compositions in Shona, their home language interferes. The children write compositions using the language they speak. 'We can understand what they are writing, but the examiners at grade seven might not accept it.' It seems that the children are able to transfer the skills of reading and writing Shona to reading and writing Chikunda or Chichewa, or the mixture that is used at home. Some of the parents confirmed this by saying their children are capable of reading and writing their letters when requested to do so.

In one school the discussion developed further revealing why children preferred the farm school to another, nearer, school in an adjacent communal area. The farm children said that at that school they were teased about their language, which is referred to as 'ChiBlantyre'. They felt it was important for them to learn to speak Shona fluently so that they do not get laughed at and called 'Mablantyre'.

For many children their preferred subject was English because it enables them to communicate with people who do not speak Shona. Moreover they know that to get a job, they will need to

Photographer: Kerstin Hacker

pass English, 'When I get a job, it will not be hard for me to speak with English speakers (*nevarungu*).' Other children found the subject frustrating because 'English is difficult. I'm not able to express myself and say what I think, especially in compositions.' This is not surprising when English may be the child's third language; when they do not hear it spoken; and when there are no books. None the less, the national educational policy is that instruction should be in English from grade four. However teachers said that they generally use a mixture of Shona and English so that pupils understand the concepts being taught.

Extra-curricula activities

In addition to their class work, the children take part in various activities which (depending on the school) may, at best, include several of the following: athletics, drama, drum majorettes, music, netball, percussion band, poetry reading and writing, physical education (PE), soccer, traditional dance. School teams take part in competitions, but only with neighbouring schools. The main constraint is transport. The teachers indicated that they could not make repeated requests for transport from the responsible authority because the vehicles are used on the farm. The headmasters of two schools said that if their requests for transport were made in good time, they were considered positively, but not otherwise; and in order to reduce the burden of the demand, they only tried to organize visits to neighbouring schools. Consequently farm children have limited exposure to other children and situations.

The pupils enjoy the outings. 'It is fun. We sing and dance, especially if our team is winning,' and 'We get to know other people and other places.' Asked where they would like to go, they mentioned neighbouring schools because of their nice uniforms, the popularity of the sports teams and the cleanliness of the school. They also said they would like to visit places such as Bindura, Harare, Karoi, Kariba, Mount Pleasant, Victoria Falls and the National Parks, just to see what they are like. Some children mentioned places as far away as South Africa (to buy second-hand clothes for sale), USA (because their money is stronger than ours), DRC (to liberate the country from the rebels), and Iraq (for protection when war starts!) The children's knowledge of events outside Zimbabwe is probably from their social studies programme or radio and television – as there are usually several families with these in the farm villages.

However, a lack of exposure to the outside world was seen by both the teachers and parents as limiting the children's perceptions of what they would like to be in future.

Relationship between teachers and children

A child's learning experience is critically affected by the relationship that develops with the

teacher. Teachers in the farm schools in the survey, appear not to be aware of this. Although many of the children liked their teachers, and even admired them, a considerable number claimed that their teachers abused them verbally and physically. Children showed the researchers scars on their arms and legs where they had been either pinched or beaten by the teachers, for not having done their homework, being late for school or for answering back. Some children claimed that the beatings were linked to the fact that the teacher smoked *mbanje* in class. On one farm, however, some children claimed they had deserved the beatings because they had misbehaved.

Corporal punishment

Teachers questioned about corporal punishment admitted that beatings are delivered:

- to keep discipline.
- to improve children's grades.
- for lying about reasons for absenteeism from school.
- for stealing, and
- for using bad language.

Teachers also claimed that some parents ask teachers to beat their children if they are problem children. Three headmasters, one in a registered and two in unregistered schools, when questioned about such practices maintained that only headmasters – or a person delegated to do so – may administer corporal punishment. In one school the headmaster also stressed that in registered schools, no girl may be beaten. Another headmaster at an unregistered school said that the school had received a circular from the rural district council that discouraged teachers from this practice. Nevertheless, after repeated questioning, headmasters admitted that they were aware that some teachers do beat children.

In registered schools staff development to raise awareness about the rules and regulations does occasionally take place and if there is no change the teacher in question is reported to the district officer. In unregistered schools, however, the headmaster can only discuss the issue with the parents and farmer until a solution is found. And many parents approve of beating.

Point of view: female teacher at an unregistered school

Accommodation is a problem. The house I use provides almost no shelter during the rainy season. It has leakages due to broken sheets. I have to walk almost half a kilometre to collect water for drinking and bathing. Sometimes I have to fetch firewood for there is no electricity. This is a problem during working hours. Sometimes I send students to do these duties on my behalf during their spare time. However parents are somehow ignorant, they discourage children from working for teachers. Some even stop their children from going to school because of these duties. Sometimes they promise to use witchcraft against the teachers after beating the children for punishment.

Sexual harassment

On four farms the girls expressed active dislike and fear of teachers who asked schoolgirls to go out with them and wrote them love letters. At one registered school, a teacher had raped a grade seven girl, and then simply transferred to another school, while the girl had been taken out of school. Teachers (8/10) including five headmasters, felt that sexual harassment by teachers, contributed to girls dropping out of school. One teacher said, 'Most girls' work is affected by undue attention from a member of staff, while many become afraid and simply stay away from school.' Others are sexually assaulted leading to pregnancy. The latter was reported on 4/9 farms, while on one farm the previous headmaster had finally been arrested for having raped 21 girls over a number of years. A headmaster abused a girl, who was supposed to win a prize for her performance in class – she didn't receive it because she refused to have a love affair with him. Indeed she complained to her parents and on investigation it was found to be true. He was transferred.

Forced labour

Of eight teachers interviewed about this practice, four professed to be aware of it and

to use children as unpaid workers. None of the teachers appeared to be aware of any legislation pertaining to child labour. The type of tasks identified by them, as being allocated to students, included:

- cleaning the houses of female teachers, by girls.
- weeding teachers' gardens, by boys.

Those who did not agree with the practice, claimed that it:

- interfered with the children's school hours or prevented them going home after school had ended.
- encouraged abuse of girls by male teachers.
- increased children's tiredness, since they are also required to work at home.

Several headmasters, however, maintained that general work around the school, undertaken during the holidays or in week-ends, was a good thing, as it enabled children to learn something about agriculture (care of the gardens) and gave them access to library books (as a reward). The duties listed by the teachers as manual work done around the school included: cutting grass, watering and picking flowers and vegetables, maintaining the orchard, picking up litter, sweeping the grounds. The headmasters were proud of their schools, and felt that the children's contribution to their upkeep was an important part of their training. One headmaster listed, as his school's greatest achievement the water project they had completed with the help of the farmer because it made it 'easier for the children to water flowers and vegetables'.

Involvement of the parents in the life of the school

Most of the parents in the group discussions indicated it was important for parents to be involved and visit the school at least once a term. Many felt this was not enough, but 'we are very busy at work and we do not have enough time to come often. We would like to see improvements in the school environment and to see how the children's projects are progressing. But most of the workers are at work from 6 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. They are free only on Saturday afternoon and Sunday and this is the only time they are free to do their own things.' In principle, the parents felt it that it was important to be involved in the school: 'We want to see how well our children are doing and whether or not they are behaving well. If they are not, we tell the teachers to discipline them because they are in charge of the children when they are at school.'

In the focus-group discussions it was clear that both the children and the parents knew what would improve the schools and the quality of education. They said there was a need for the provision of a better infrastructure such as:

- more classrooms so there would no longer be a need for hot-seating.
- more desks so that the children would have somewhere to sit and write instead of sitting on the ground and balancing their books on their laps.
- more farm schools, so that the children did not have to walk so far.
- more and better accommodation for the teachers. It was generally agreed in the focus group discussions that the relationship between the school and the farmworkers improves when the teacher takes an interest in or is part of the community.
- the provision of secondary schools so that education after primary school ceased to be a remote possibility.

One parent summarized their commitment to their children's education as follows, 'We the parents built this school for our children because we want them to be educated.'

Relevance of education

The extent to which they felt school prepared them for their future careers formed part of the focus-group discussions in two schools. The children felt that learning English prepared them for secondary school where they would get the O-level qualifications they need for other careers. It was, however, acknowledged that very few farm children go on to secondary

school and that those few who do acquire a secondary education usually return to work on the farm, without their qualifications being recognized. An example was given of one young man, a secondary school-leaver employed on the farm as a security guard: 'Nobody asks for a certificate to employ you as a security guard. All you need is to be able to keep awake.'

Even those who pass the final grade seven examination do not have their qualifications recognized. They are paid the same as those who previously dropped out of school. Staying on at school does not make any difference to their future. In one school, both the youth and parents described situations in which, at the end of each school year, the children who had dropped out of school tease those who join the work force after completing grade seven, form two (ZJC) or form four (O-level) because there is no difference in the type of jobs or the payment given to them.

Teachers felt that the government should exercise some form of affirmative action so that children from farming areas may be employed in the nearest district offices. This, they said, would provide incentives and role models for the children attending farm schools.

Another issue of concern is that of the relevance of the current curricula. In 1992 the NPA spoke of the on-going revision of curricula, development of new teaching and learning materials, provision of more technical subjects ... (and) continuing education for employment.[4] As elsewhere in Zimbabwe, the educational curricula at farm schools, whether the school is registered or not, follows a very traditional line not only in terms of the subjects taught[5] but also in terms of pedagogy and approach, which encourages a reverence for authority and not a questioning creative spirit.

The limited education that most farm children receive, given that most only achieve three to five years of schooling, makes them unemployable except perhaps on the farms. Yet they learn little at school which equips them to obtain a 'good' job on a farm i.e. that of a clerk or driver. Although practical subjects are taught in some farm schools, much depends on the interest and capacity of the teacher in these areas. Technical subjects are taught at some teacher training colleges, but to limited numbers, and subsequently the graduates very often leave the teaching profession. Secondly most technical subjects are more expensive to teach than the more conventional subjects, as they require expensive tools and materials. Although most children thought that what they were learning was important to help them get a job when they left school, a few nevertheless stressed that the practical subjects would help them to get a job on the farms.

When asked which subjects they liked most, the children ranked religious and moral education, Shona, fashion and fabrics, and woodwork, English and maths as the most popular subjects. They added, however, that they would also like to learn building, cookery, sewing and mechanics. In one grade seven class, the children justifiably complained about having to learn French, saying they would prefer commerce and accounts. With reference to the general subject content, the only constraint the children mentioned was that they are not given opportunities to practice what they learn in, ironically, agriculture. It would seem that although the children are given duties to tend and water the vegetables in the school garden, these duties are often not related to their theoretical knowledge or seen as part of the curriculum. In one school, the farmer has employed somebody to work in the garden and the children work there only when they are on punishment.

The children said they liked maths. Learning how to count helps them to calculate change when shopping, or when they are selling sweets. In all the schools there were children with packets of sweets for sale. Having to calculate change is therefore a skill they use every day.

One parent, when asked about the relevance of the education her children were receiving,

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[4] GOZ 1992. UNICEF 1994

[5] English, Shona, maths, content (history, geography, environmental studies religious and moral education).

replied: 'The education our children receive is not relevant because after grade four they have nowhere to go. Tell me where you can go with your grade four education? [Nowhere] except to follow in your father and mother's footsteps in the farmer's fields.'

Clearly what is useful or relevant is measured differently by different people, The more irrelevant the curriculum, the less likely it is that children will be able to connect what they are learning to anything they know. This will make it harder for them to do well at school, or to compete in the job market afterwards.[6]

In addition some children on commercial farms seldom leave its confines and their role models are those of senior farmworkers. Thus their dreams for a future are bounded by this reality. However others, some of whom come from homes with televisions, articulated a wide range of dreams for future employment, ranging from being a president, pilot, nurse, teacher, radio announcer, to being a baby-minder.

Many, however, expressed the desire to be farm health workers, gardeners, domestics, foremen, tractor or lorry drivers.

The issue is complex: On the one hand, children should be allowed to dream, but if their dreams have no basis in an appropriate or solid education backed up by grants and scholarships, these dreams can only die, leaving a discouraged adult. On the other hand, if the education that children receive does not assist them in their future work on the farm, nor improve their well-being, nor their health and their ability to control their own family lives, we must ask: what is its value?

Communication between children, parents and teachers on HIV/AIDS and teenage sexuality

Given the increasing problems of HIV and AIDS in the farm communities and the growing number of orphans, as well as the problems of teenage pregnancies and parenting, we were interested to know what information and education the children received that would help them to gain greater control over their own lives. Thus focus group discussions were held with the children, teachers and parents on what forms of communication exist concerning teenage sexuality, HIV and AIDS prevention in their schools and communities.

In two of the communities, there seemed to be problems relating to girls staying at school after grade five (One school, however, had 19 girls more than boys in grade seven). In another, the boys described the situation as follows:

> *Boys start having girlfriends from the age of about fourteen. The parents are not aware of this because the boys go to the girls around midnight. When the girl becomes pregnant, the boy refuses responsibility saying she has other boyfriends. Parents say that sex is like body lotion. Once a girl or boy starts having sex it is difficult to stop. Girls want money. The boys go and steal it from their parents and then they go to sleep together.*

The parents said that mothers are responsible for talking to their daughters and fathers to their sons. However, some of the parents said they had problems discussing sensitive issues with their children. Some felt that many of them do not have the skills to talk about sexuality with their children. The parents said they do not know how to start. One male parent said the discussion often begins after something has gone wrong.

> *The discussion then is not a discussion but an argument, which can be very unhealthy and uncomfortable, leading to situations where children leave home in anger.*

The parents who had succeeded in establishing communication with their children said their starting point was those children in the community who had become pregnant or made a girl pregnant. They talk about hygiene, HIV/AIDS prevention and about avoiding teenage pregnancies.

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[6] Ogadhoh and Molteno, 1998

The parents recognized that it was not easy to discuss sexuality with their children, as this was not something they had experienced, nor the cultural norm. They agreed, however, that times have changed. They no longer live close to the children's paternal aunts, maternal uncles or grandparents and so they have a responsibility to deal with these sensitive issues themselves. One woman described the situation as follows: 'It is hard, but I do it myself. If you send somebody else, they might not talk to your child the way you want. I want to see for myself what my child is thinking.'

In some situations, sisters or other members of the extended family are taking care of their younger siblings. The older sisters said that it was very difficult to give advice to their young sisters on issues of sexuality. One woman described how her younger sister had threatened her when she attempted to talk to her about having left school and about having boyfriends too early: 'If you stop me from having boyfriends I'm coming to take over your husband.' As this was not an empty threat, the older sister left her younger sister alone.

The children were asked who they would confide in on matters of sexuality. The girls felt they would talk to their paternal aunt.

> *If I got pregnant and told my sister about it, she would ask me who is responsible and if I said it was one of the boys at school, my sister would probably advise me to go for an older man with money. My aunt would take me to see the boy's parents or guardians and let them know what their son had done.*

The girls did not seem to have much confidence in their older sisters as counsellors. 'We see some of what they do with men and it is not good.'

The boys said they would confide in their maternal uncles. It needs to be mentioned, however, that the practice of girls seeking advice from their paternal aunt and boys from their maternal uncle used to be common in traditionally matrilineal communities. The farm communities are very mobile and many children do not have access to these aunts and uncles. Some parents said, however, that it is possible for families to develop close relationships with neighbours as long as they speak a similar language and come from the same area, or have the same totem. In some communities the parents could send their children for counselling to members of the extended family developed in the same community.

In the absence of the extended family, young people depend on their peers for advice, although they accepted the fact that their peers were likely to have just as much knowledge about sexuality as they did.

In two of the communities, the churches there had already established a youth programme on AIDS prevention education. There is a need to find out the content of these programmes and how effective they are for the children.

It seems at home, parents start talking with their children on sensitive issues only when something has gone wrong, either with their child or the neighbours' children. Family communication on sensitive issues does not seem to be part of routine family life for children on commercial farms.

Generally there is very little, if any, family life education provided in schools and the teachers have not been trained to handle this sensitive subject. Only one of the schools has had access to the UNICEF-funded *Let's Talk About* series which they introduced at grade four. The *Let's Talk About* series (grade four to form four) deals with the development of life skills such as decision-making, negotiation, self-expression, confidence-building, self-assertiveness, dealing with peer pressure, group dynamics etc which help young people protect themselves from getting into risky situations.

It seems clear, however, that this is an area in which very much more needs to be done if children are going to learn how to make informed and responsible choices about their own, and their children's lives.

Children's aspirations for careers

Children on commercial farms have aspirations for their future, just like people in other communities: 'Our parents want us to work hard

to prepare for the future; they say it is better for us to be more educated than they were.'

In the focus-group discussions some children expressed a desire to go to university, others to college, others to do A- or O-level. The children, however, recognized that these ambitions were very unlikely to be realized.

> *We would like to get to university and college, but schools are far away from here and most of us end at grade six, some at grade seven. There are many children who have completed grade seven but they are sitting at home, idle.* [The farmer does not allow child workers.] *Some come to read at school just to pass the time. Where can they go and look for jobs with only grade seven?*

In addition many farm schools do not go up to grade seven and many are a long way from secondary schools, so children will not be able to attend even, in the unlikely event, of parents being able to afford the fees, uniforms, transport, board, food.

Many children we spoke to were interested in careers which reflected their experiences on the farms such as being a house-girl for the farmer, or a foreman's wife. The teachers in all the schools we visited said these were the careers most commonly selected by the pupils because they knew no other environment. A few children were more ambitious and wanted to be doctors, pilots, engineers, a minister of education, policemen and policewomen, teachers ('I want to stop the child-beating that is taking place now, to help improve people's lives'), scientists, dentists, nurses, a headmaster, a manager,

postmasters, clerks, truck drivers, lawyers, and an author. None of the children or their parents wanted to be farmers. Asked why this was so, the children said school does not prepare them for farming. They would never be able to farm like the farm owners because it needs a lot of money to buy all the expensive equipment needed.

The following pictures, drawn by primary school children indicate some typical job choices.

Many of the children who reached grade seven at the farm school, managed to pass the examination. However less than half of these children go on to secondary school. This is a matter which needs to be urgently addressed if there is going to be the provision of meaningful

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education on the commercial farms. Some farmers are willing to pay the secondary school fees for children that have done well and a few have established study groups. Some parents send the grade seven leavers to the rurual or urban areas to stay with relatives and continue with their education in this way but the majority of children, simply stay at home until they marry.

Point of view: Sole teacher for a secondary study group

My day starts at 3.00 a.m. I start by going over my lesson plans for the four composite classes that I teach. I then make the necessary teaching and learning aids. If I finish all this before 6.30 a.m., I start making plans for the next day. At 6.30 I take a bath and at 7.00 I have my breakfast.

By 7.30 I must be in the classroom to prepare the chalkboard work for the coming lessons. Usually I make diagrams. Lessons start at eight o'clock. When it is Monday, it is maths for form ones and then fifteen minutes of explanations and demonstrations in science for the form threes. Then we do the necessary experiments and these take about 25 minutes. While I am busy with the form threes, the form four student is writing a summary in English that I gave him at eight o'clock. When I am through with the science class, I teach English grammar to the form twos, and then I check the summary for the form four student. Usually I give the two examination classes, form ... o and four, more attention.

By 10 a.m. I have successfully taught two subjects per class, by one o'clock, I have taught fours subjects. This

I want to work for ZBC

is really an achievement, but I am not satisfied, I feel I should do more. At 2 p.m. the students come back for work studies, except on Friday. While they are busy with their work, I will mark their books and point out their mistakes. I give them homework every day and dismiss them at four o'clock. When they are free they can either play football or netball or go home.

During the holidays I usually spend long hours in the library in Bindura, doing research on the subjects that I teach. It is very hard to teach at a farm school where facilities are poor, where there is no entertainment at the end of the day, where your neighbours don't understand the importance of education, where language in the compound is foul – well, the list is endless. But I am happy because I am helping my fellow Zimbabweans and even more so when they pass.

Section 6

Adult perceptions

In the preceding sections, we have drawn on interviews that have been done with children, teachers, parents and farmers. Extracts from these texts have been included in the document.

However, we thought that it would be useful to include several interviews in their totality, as the issues are complex, multi-layered and vary from farm to farm according to the interest, concern and involvement of the farmer, the teachers, and the parents.

Thus, in this chapter, we are including an interview with a headmaster from a farm school twenty kilometres from the centre of Harare, a health worker, a programme officer who has worked with Save the Children Fund for over ten years, and two farmers wives who have become involved in education on their farms. Where possible we have tried not to duplicate information that has come through other interviews, extracts of which have been included in the text in Chapters 3-6.

What we learn is:

- how much the social lives of children can intrude upon their ability to attend school and how family problems can impact upon their ability to perform.
- how parents need to be encouraged to get more directly involved in the activities of the school, and helped to understand how their performance is affected by difficulties experienced at home.
- how farmers of goodwill also need to be encouraged to involve themselves, and enabled to discuss issues of significance with a wider group of people.
- how despite the complexity of the problems, there are certain issues to which practical solutions can be found providing that there is goodwill on all sides.

Extracts from an interview with a headmaster

HM: I have been at this school for this last three months. Previously I was working at Beregoni Primary School, also a farm school.

SCF: How do the two schools compare with each other?

HM: This school has more facilities. We have a hall and enough classrooms for all the pupils. We don't have any hot-seating. We have enough toilets for the teachers and the children. And we have a building for the pre-school. The only thing we don't have is teachers' accommodation.

SCF: And this is all provided by the farmer?

HM: Yes

SCF: How many pupils are there at the school?

HM: We have got 340 pupils in eight classes, because we use the hall, which is divided into three so that it caters for all the pupils.

SCF: What do you think are the main problems experienced by the children who come to this school?

HM: The main problem is school fees. Actually, they

don't pay fees but there is just a small levy, $17 per term. However most pupils find it difficult to raise the money and as a result they fail to come to school. We also have a problem of pupils coming to school without having been fed properly.

SCF: What is the main catchment area for the children who come to your school?

HM: Komani Estates, Eskbank Farm, Chitapa Farm, University Farm and domestic workers from Marlborough who fail to send their children to the Group A schools.

SCF: So does the problem of school fees effect children from all the farms or from particular farms?

HM: It is the children from the farming areas. Those who come from Mt Pleasant and Marlborough don't have a problem. But another reason why pupils fail to pay the levy is probably ignorance on the part of their parents. Their failure to realize the importance of educating their children. I think the parents need a bit of education so they can understand the importance of sending their children to school.

SCF: How much communication do you have with parents – or is it a bit too soon to tell because you haven't been at this school very long? Do you have regular meetings with parents?

HM: This term we only had one meeting on our opening day. That's when we had to involve the farmer and ask him to tell the parents about the importance of sending their children to school. We have got so many children in the compounds who are not coming to school – children of school-going age – who are just seated at home. So he tried to explain this to the parents, and he also told them that he was subsidizing the school – because $17 is a very little to have to pay.

SCF: I know some headmasters have the same problems and they put it down to parental illiteracy. Others have said that the parents are enthusiastic and want their children to go to school. It is said that if you don't have education, you have no future. However, as unemployment in the towns is very high, whether the workers here are in any way affected by this. They might say, 'What's the point of sending my children to school because there are no jobs anyway'. What do you think?

HM: I don't feel that our community is at all affected by its nearness to town. It's just illiteracy. Parents don't value education for their children. Probably they have noted that children who have been to secondary school come back and work on the farm and they are given almost the same remuneration. Maybe they have come to the conclusion that it is pointless to send children to school. They prefer having children looking after the others, when the mothers work to subsidize the breadwinner's income, rather than have the child come and spend the whole day here, while the mother stays at home looking after the kids. Especially because at the end of the day the one who has gone to school and one who has not gone to school are getting the same remuneration. I think there is need to educate the parents that it is not just a matter of money when we send children to school. We want them to learn, to be literate, to be able to read and write on their own, to lead their own lives. If the parents get to understand this, they might change their attitude. In the compounds there are some parents who have a very positive attitude towards the school, and others who have a very negative attitude, and yet they are neighbours.

SCF: Is there stability in the farm working community?

HM: They move from one farm to another, each and every time. Those who are lucky move to a neighbouring farm so they can still send their children to school here. But others, well if they go to another area it means the end of the child's education.

SCF: Why would they want to leave the farm?

HM: It's not their wish. They are casual or seasonal labourers; or there might be problems which result in the family moving from one farm to another. The divorce rate in our compounds is high. I don't know why, but farmworkers separate easily. They marry today, have kids and they separate. And then we find that most of the children that we have in our school are staying with stepmothers, or stepfathers. Sometimes the mother might even be living in the same compound, but she must leave the kids with the father. And then the stepmother's attitude towards children that are not her own is negative, she can easily influence the father not to send them to school. For example on a day when we are closing schools you see quite a number of pupils coming to the office asking for transfer letters. Now its not because they have been asked by parents to ask for transfer letters – no – its from within themselves they want a transfer letter. They hide that transfer letter. It is not shown to the parent. Then when the child goes for the holiday to a relative, he or she tries to say, 'I have come, I have got my transfer letter and I want to learn here'. He or she will be lying. In fact yesterday there were many who needed transfers, but when I asked them to bring their parents here, either a sister, stepmother or a stepfather to confirm this, they don't come. It is a result of instability, of child abuse. They will be

trying to run away. The way a stepmother treats other children is different from the way she treats her own kids. They are made to work, they are made to do all sorts of things.

When we have a kid whom we think has a problem, we try to find out what it is. If she is a girl we ask the lady teachers to help the pupil and if it's a boy we also ask male teachers to try and find out the problem, but we cannot actually help them.

Interview with a health worker

I have been working on this farm since 1987. I look after children and I provide treatment for them. I am also a representative of women.

I like my job because it shows me that Zimbabwe must have good health. It also encourages parents to practise good health habits. Our place was backward, but now we can see that there are many activities taking place in our communities. Before, there were no toilets, no rubbish pits, no pre-schools, no places to look after orphans. And, we were not able to start projects like sewing, knitting and cookery.

But I still feel that parents are not doing enough to educate their children so that they can have a good life. Children can't go further than grade seven because of a lack of school fees. The problem is that three-quarters of the parents did not go school and so they do not encourage their children to do so. They see this as normal. This leads to the problem of early marriages. If we create awareness among parents, the problem of early marriages can be prevented because some children will listen to the advice of their parents though others are stubborn, but through awareness workshops this can be achieved.

Many early marriages do not last because the girls will be immature. A girl child who is married at thirteen creates more problems because she is not mature enough to be a mother. Girls should be encouraged to marry when they are say nineteen or twenty, because if they marry when they are younger, the chances of divorce are very high. Once the children are in love, they are seen to be misbehaving by their parents and they are told to go to the boys. As long as they are caught having an affair they are no longer allowed to remain in the family. They are told to have their own homes. That is when a decision is said to be coming from the parents.

But at times the decision to divorce is also made by the parents. They see that there is domestic violence, and they counsel their daughter or son, and they tell them that even their neighbours are not happy to hear quarzelling all the time. When there is domestic violence and then divorce, a girl can go back to her parents, but at times she looks for another husband, sometimes she has a chain of two or three husbands. I think the parents are to blame because they do not advise the child properly. But children do not always listen to parents. If you tell them not to go out at night they do not listen to you. And there is prostitution. The girls see others at the beerhall, and they want to imitate them.

You find that when there are families with three children, these families are able to look after their children, but those with five children and above are having problems. We should start with reducing the size of families. It is difficult because of the men. Some men accept the idea, but others do not. And on the farms we have the problem of husbands who beat their wives.

It is also important for the elders to behave well because of this AIDS epidemic. There are now so many orphans. Both parents die and leave poverty behind for their families. Parents should be encouraged to exercise self-control. That is the only way they can reduce the spreading of AIDS.

Here we have another orphan problem when the families, who are tasked with looking after the orphans, do not look after them properly. It would be a good thing if there was a committee (including the farmer himself) to look into the welfare of these orphans and see how their situation could be improved. On our farm, the farmer provides mealie-meal, blankets and clothes. The Farmworkers Development Committee is a bridge between us and the farmer.

I have seven children, three boys and four girls. But if I could have my life again, I would have had only three children, and I would support them fully and make sure that they complete their secondary education and have a better life in the future.

I would like government to encourage parental awareness and teach them how to support their children, behave well and reduce the risk of having more orphans which we are not able to support. I would love to see many programmes focusing on orphans and adults.

There are parents who are very selfish. They get money but they use it on beer drinking and other things without realizing that having children is a precious thing. So parents should be aware of their children's rights. We should try by all means to encourage parents to look after their children.

Interview with a farmer's wife

SCF: Can you tell me how long you have been on the farm, and what you have in terms of educational facilities?

FW: We have been on the farm since December 1980. We bought it 1983 after managing it for three years. We have a pre-school for children up to school age. The junior school is across the river on Nethergreen Farm. It was easier when we all built the school to centralize it.

Then there were about five of us in the consortium. Now we are trying to keep it going on our own, because most of the farms have been sold and the new farm owners are not interested in the school.

The primary school has four blocks. A classroom block has three rooms. Then there is a headmaster's office, stationery room and so on.

I'm not sure exactly how many children there are at the school. The number fluctuates, probably close on 400. The government pays the teachers and the headmaster and there are no school fees.

Two houses were built for teachers but they chose to stay in Bindura. They don't want to live there, because it is pretty much like a farm village, with no running water and electricity. The teachers live in the high density areas in Bindura. Their homes are in Bindura. Their children are at school in there, their wives live there, they don't want to stay out on the farm. But they have to travel twenty or so kilometres. They get a very small travelling allowance. But it is a terrible road. The headmaster did have a vehicle but travelling up and down that road, it was absolutely shot. The teachers try and get lifts from the commuters. One year we tried, between us, to employ a vehicle to carry the staff but it just became too costly and it tied up that vehicle for the whole week, so we had to withdraw from that scheme.

SCF: Accommodation is obviously pretty central for teachers, that and access to other facilities, shops, clinics, and so on; and, in this case, as you say, the houses had no electricity or running water, so can I ask if you see it as a problem that the farm villages have no electricity or running water?

FW: Yes, a big problem. I think if the farmers could work together to approach government – because obviously that is who we would fall under – to get some sort of assistance for lower loans. For example, farmers get loans for irrigation – there is the NFIF scheme which we get at 8 per cent – and if government could source and issue loans at that rate, I think a lot

of the problems on the farms would be solved, because basically there is no system at all at the moment.

In our farm village, we have electricity, as in street lights, mainly because it is dark, it is very dark at night and all sorts of nuisance goes on in the dark. So basically the light is for security. We have a community hall where they hold aault literacy classes. So they needed lights because they can't see and we put electricity in. But we have watched the ZESA fees. We were paying $394 a month, that has gone up to $1900, for the same system, so our overheads are just shooting up.

SCF: Some farmers now say it costs forty to fifty thousand to put up a house, and they simply can't afford it. But in the sixties and seventies, it didn't cost that amount of money, and there are some farms where people have done nothing about accommodation, not then not now.

FW: Yes, we have seen that in our area. There are some farms that are only just putting in Blair toilets, after how many years? But I think in the past, going to the school, government was mainly involved, I don't think the farmers were so involved.

SCF: You say the primary school is now mainly your responsibility. The four incoming farmers have not shown any interest in it?

FW: None at all. The farmer whose farm it was on was an elderly man and he retired and sold the farm. The farmers surrounding it are now all indigenous farmers, and basically they don't feel the same responsibility for education. They feel the government should be solely responsible, and the more they put in, the more government will step back – which is true, but government cannot financially support the school. But the new farmers have really taken a back seat and won't get involved at all.

SCF: Not even in terms of approaching government.

FW: No, not at all, strangely enough.

SCF: The school is registered – do you have any liaison with government now? You must have done to start with ?

FW: Only through the headmaster. He does everything.

SCF: The headmaster was appointed by government?

FW: Yes. He is a very good head. We are fortunate. He has been there a long time, so obviously there has been no promotion for him either. But it is a blessing for us that he has not been moved. He controls the running of the school, and he will come to us for assistance when he needs to. But things like buildings, maintenance and furniture – well, the government used to give a grant, at one stage it was 50 per cent of the cost, and we used it to purchase materials and then we would all get together and put up the next block. But I don't think we have received anything for at least two years now.

SCF: The school goes up to grade seven, and you say the attendance fluctuates a lot. What do you see as being the main reasons for this?

FW: Well, first, weather. The first term, when it rains, the bridges are often under water and the Mazowe Bridge floods. There is a walkway that the children can use, but to me it would be very dangerous. A lot of the slats have been stolen, and so there are great big gaps in the walkway. So the parents quite rightly don't want their children to use it. We wouldn't want our children trying to cross the river like that. Also the teachers can't get out to the school. This last year, when we had heavy rains, the school was closed for just about the whole first term.

Another reason is that the children just play truant. And the older parents – well education was never part of their life – don't encourage their children to go to school. And if they have gone to the lands, they don't realize that their kids are just sitting around.

SCF: Why do you think the children don't go to school.

FW: I suppose, like most children, freedom seems preferable. When I think of my son in particular, he would love to miss school. It is maybe just the discipline, and having to be in that classroom all day and having to learn. And the teachers need to be motivated. You find that if the teachers are not around, or they go off for the day, it rubs off on the children, it has an effect on them. My husband goes out quite often to Mukombora. He does Bible distribution, and he sees so many schools where the teachers are not there and the headmaster is not there, the children have all drifted off home, and so on. It is quite hard for those teachers, because they need to do their shopping, they need to get to town, and they are miles away from anywhere. But it is not good for the children.

SCF: Thinking about your own school, I can't see how the teachers can get from Bindura to Nethergreen – the distance, the bad roads, the lack of buses – by eight o'clock in the morning.

FW: They leave home early. I go in on a Monday, just to drop my son at school and go straight home, now that's at twenty to seven, and there are usually teachers already waiting for lifts. They do so from half past six. But when the rains start, there is absolutely no way that they can make it to the school. But it would be really be very good if you could talk to the headmaster, then could get involved too. You could hear his opinions and feelings about the problems we have discussed.

SCF: And are there adequate books at the school?

FW: Yes, they are sufficient, but they could have a lot more. But they do have sufficient to follow the curriculum. They do their grade seven exams. Some of the results are outstanding, really outstanding. It is such a pity, because the children who get these outstanding results suddenly disappear. A grandfather takes them off to his communal land and that is the end of their education.

I have started a secondary school on our farm, but we have limited it to our workers only just because we don't have the facilities and the means to expand it. The secondary schools in Bindura are very expensive, because it is a town. If people are fortunate enough to have family in some of the communal areas, there are some good secondary schools and they might be sent there.

SCF: One of the points that has been made over and over again by both parents and children is that they simply cannot afford school.

FW: I think this really only applies in town.

SCF: No, even if the school is free, it is the cost of uniforms, exercise books, pens and pencils on a farmworker's wage... I think the minimum wage is now $1200 and if you have more than one child at school, it is very difficult.

FW: Most of the workers get paid just over $1000 a month, yes.

SCF: But a school uniform costs two or three hundred dollars? So 'school fees' becomes a sort of compendium phrase for everything that people can't afford. Do you see a way around this? Without wanting to load everything on to the farmers, how do you think farmworkers could be helped to have their children go to school?

FW: Unless each worker, each child that went to school, was given a subsidy ... this would encourage parents to send their children to school, but it would have to be very carefully controlled.

We have a lot of women in our village who sew and we have sewing machines, but we have found that even buying the material and sewing the uniforms, doesn't work out that much cheaper. So a lot of them tend not to have a proper uniform.

SCF: Yes, a lot of teachers have said that they turn a blind eye if the child doesn't wear the full uniform, but quite a lot of parents and children say that they feel ashamed to have to go to school without a proper uniform. Being earmarked as coming from a very poor family is a great disincentive to the child.

FW: That's right. Yes, it is. But besides giving a subsidy and encouraging them, I am actually not sure...

SCF: How many farmers do you think would be willing to provide a subsidy?

FW: Looking at our school, none at all. But our neighbours have Uronga School where we have a few children asked us to pay so much per child from our farm, which we did. They built another classroom block and another toilet section. I thought that was a good idea. I think we paid something like $30 or $40 per child. We thought of trying this with the farmers in our area, but no one wanted to pay. And also it is important for the parents to realize that they do learn something at school.

SCF: Another factor is that the farmer does not pay any more if the worker has grade seven education. They receive the same as a worker with no education at all. And this is a great disincentive for parents. They invest in the child's education but receive no reward. It often hardly seems worth it.

FW: Well, nobody is allowed to be employed before they are eighteen. My husband will not employ them and that is that. Also we don't have the facilities to teach them the trades and so on. Now the education they receive, reading and writing is just basic, but it is actually very important to learn a trade. Before, if the father was a carpenter, the son would go into the workshop and learn, the same with the tractor driver, and so on. But we have lost all that. I think it is quite difficult because some of them will get educated to a certain point, and then they do just go into the lands and their education is wasted. Before you could channel them into being an electrician or mechanic or clerk.

SCF: Except that there are a limited number of skilled jobs on any farm, and if the average number of children in a family is four, you won't be able to employ them all.

FW: That's right, yes.

SCF: Would you say that the more educated the worker, the more the farmer benefits?

FW: Not necessarily. If they are out in the lands, in the fields, basically it is just a manual job. So one only needs minimal education.

SCF: Can we turn again to the issue of casual work? You say, some of the children resent the fact that they can't do casual work in the school holidays because it was a way of earning enough money to pay school fees or for the school uniform. You don't employ people casually?

FW: If we grow cotton, which we just recently stopped

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doing, we will employ the family, but we won't actually employ the children. But if the family chooses to take their children with them to help pick cotton, they will get paid, because they get paid so much per kilo. Often you will find the younger ones picking, but other than this you can't employ children under eighteen. Legally we are not allowed to, it is in the Child Labour Act. So it is a problem. I can bring them in, say to my garden, and they can sit and do a day's work and I can pay them, but other than that we are just not allowed to, so there is no way for them to earn money.

SCF: I think the law says a bit more – I thought from the age of fifteen they could do light work for a certain number of hours, it is not 'no work', it is light work and it is not with fertilisers, or pesticides, and it is supervised work. The terms under which children can work are quite rigorous but they are not exclusive.

FW: Right. And it would depend on what crops you are growing, because so many things are now being mechanized. You know maize, soya beans and wheat are all being sown by these big machines. Seeds are no longer dropped in by hand. So this has also contributed to the problem. It is going to make things worse.

However, I think the better educated don't want to stay on the farm, they want to move into the towns. This could also be a problem, because there is no work for them. There is not anything they can do that will give them job satisfaction, but they go to town thinking it is better. So we try and look at the ones who have done really well in grade seven and encourage them to further their education.

This is why I started the secondary school, to try and get them going. And there are quite a few who did their ZJC last year and then moved into form three. They had already done form one in town, but could not afford the fees any longer, so we set the school up and we can only hope that some of these boys – they are doing so well – will progress. One is very keen on engineering. But he won't stay on the farm. We will encourage him to get a good job and he in turn will then be able to help his family back on the farm, which would be a good thing. But there are not that many of them. You have a few that you can single out to try and help.

SCF: This study group – because it is a study group – rather than a school, yes?

FW: It is a study group, yes. I can't call it anything else. We pay the teacher. We use Rapid Results. The course for two years is very reasonable. We pay outright and the parents pay it back over the two years. It works out at about $25 a month. The money goes back into the kitty. Obviously if they need to do exams later, like those O-levels, we could possibly use that money. The teacher we have is actually amazing because he has all these different groups. He explains something on the board to one group so they can get on with the lesson, and then he will move on to another group. They are incredible, because some of them are very motivated and self-disciplined.

We also provide books. We have got a huge big library down there, all the books that our children have finished with, the National Geographics; The Farmer, *our newspapers, all of them. They are all utilized. So from that point of view there is a good reference library. And now we have put an old computer in, so the children can get the feel of it and see what computers are all about. I have also bought a lot of the textbooks that the teacher has needed, maths and the English and so on. He uses them to prepare lessons for the children. And the teacher allows others to come to the library in the afternoons if he is there. The benches and tables are there. You can read a book there. We have said that the books are not to go out of the library because otherwise they will go missing or have things dropped on them. But it is up to him to control. I do go down, but not often, I don't want him to think that I am interfering or checking on him. He comes to me if he has problems.*

SCF: How useful do you think it would be, to have a workshop between the teachers and the farmers wives, because usually they are the ones who take an interest in the school?

FW: Very useful because then the teachers can explain what their problems are. It is hard when you are not involved, to see the different areas where they are struggling, and where they need help and assistance. Yes, I think workshops would be a good idea.

SCF: Do you know all the other farmers' wives who are supporting education? Do you support each other?

FW: I was going to say, I know all the farmers' wives, but there are only a few who are involved in schools, very few. I am not sure why. Two of our neighbours are both teachers and you can see that their school and the headmaster ... well, it is just amazing. But I think the others just tend to let things be. And if there is a government school, the farmworkers' children just go and that's it. They don't involve themselves at all.

SCF: But they are the people who can make a difference?

FW: Yes, they can, they can. But I think everybody is feeling so negative at the moment. Land designation has really hammered the farmers. I don't think it has been easy for a lot of farmers to try and work it through, to think about what we are doing, and where we go from here? But at the same time if I look back,

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I see how little has been achieved twenty years after Independence. We really have not done what we could have done or should have done to form a bridge between the government and the farmer. There is still a huge gap between them. There are still some farmers who should be taken to task, but they just carry on, you know and it has a ripple effect, you know, it allows the government to claim …

SCF: Yes, the good work of several farmers can be lost or forgotten, when one farmer has done nothing or treats his workers badly. Then both sides fall back on stereotypes. What can be done to break these down?

FW: Often the farmers just don't know what is happening. I know of a farmer, much further away, who got a letter from the government saying that his children are walking ten kilometres to school and are exhausted before they even begin their lessons. He was totally unaware of this. As far as he knew, his tractor was taking the children to school, because that is what had been agreed. But it was not happening like that. Some people don't know, some … well, maybe they don't care.

SCF: So if I asked you to give me a five-point programme of action, what would it be?

FW: That is difficult. I think it really is. You can call everyone together, you can say, 'Right, how are we going to go about this?' But I don't know. Our area is a particularly difficult area, a hard area, compared to others. It is not a rich tobacco farming area. They have resources. They can say this is what needs to be done. But in our area, well, we basically did our own thing. We knew we had so many workers and they were in our charge and we wanted to do something. People might say 'well done,' but you can talk till you are blue in the face and they don't seem to change one little bit.

Once we had two young American girls, two years ago now, and they went down to the primary school every morning to teach different subjects and the children attended every day because it was a novelty. And they were just filled with the most amazing ideas. It was really good for them. We could do this again.

SCF: You said you had night school as well?

FW: Yes, we have quite a few adults writing their grade seven.

SCF: And if they pass will it make any difference to their income?

FW: No, not at all. I don't think we should be set on this. Because, you know, our workers are all categorized, and that's it for the year until you get your 35 per cent or whatever. You have to be very careful. If we jump the wage structure and do whatever, the ripple effect is not good. It has a negative effect, not a positive effect. So we all tend to work within this structure.

SCF: Isn't it something that the CFU should take up?

FW: Absolutely. Yes. But there are always leeways. We can have a bonus system that doesn't affect salaries. But you can't just give them more money. It is hard.

SCF: What would be the incentive for somebody to go to adult literacy class really, unless it is going to directly improve their quality of life or directly improve their income? Because it is hard, after a long day in the fields, to go and do a class. So what do you think, what is motivating them to do it?

FW: Well Thomas was our main cattle man and he was keeping the books and he wanted to do the records himself: adding, subtracting and everything, so I think that was his motivation. Alex Watter, the pastor's, wife, wanted to work alongside her husband, learn more and read the Bible. But, yes, there needs to be some reward, or some goal, a position that they can move up to.

I would love to know the answers. How is it all going to work in the future, in the long term? Because it is quite sad when you see that we have really not progressed very much in the last twenty years.

Interview with a SCF programme officer

SCF: Can you tell me how long you have been with the Farmworkers' Programme and what areas you have covered?

PO: I have been working with the programme for seven years in Mount Darwin on the commercial farms. My job involves co-ordination. I represent SCF as a catalyst between the farmers and the government departments. The main objective of the programme is to improve the condition of farmworkers in their day-to-day living. The programme is working with schools and women's clubs; at improving water and sanitation; and at establishing of Farm Development Committees (FADCOs) which will act as the local developmental structures on the farms.

SCF: What specifically do you think are the issues affecting children's lives on commercial farms?

PO: To mention a few: the lack of primary and secondary schools and health facilities; the lack of adequate food and clothing; large families – these hinder children from going to school; polygamy which gives rise to the issue of step-parents preferring to send their own children to school, rather than those children who have been left behind by another parent; and the issue of child labour. Most children find that work is readily available on the farms and so employment takes precedence over education. Some parents don't value education. They put pressure on children to finish their education and get employed so that they can supplement the family's income. These are some of the issues that affect children on the farms.

However one of the main issues is the relationship between children and their parents because most parents on commercial farms are illiterate. So it is difficult for them to understand the importance of education. Some parents came from Malawi and Mozambique, and they have never had any education. We have been trying to introduce adult literacy courses hoping that this will encourage them to send their children to school.

At times the older girls are pressured by their parents into marriage. They cannot afford to look after girls who have dropped out of school – so their solution is to marry them; and they want to avoid promiscuity, so they encourage girls to get married.

SCF: Can you help me to tease out what appear to be a number of conflicting issues? On the one hand families are quite large – up to ten children, you have said. Do they not see this as one reason for their poverty? Or do they always see children as a source of income generation?

PO: This is a very difficult question. At times they will tell you that having two children is not good because if these children die, their lives will be difficult because there will be no one to look after them.

SCF: You say that the girl child is often married off early to avoid promiscuity. But very often she is married to an older man who already has two or three wives, and is divorced within a year. So again there seem to be a number of conflicting moral attitudes.

PO: Yes. Parents just have children. They cannot understand the issue of children's rights and requirements because they themselves are voiceless. They cannot raise their concerns to the government or the farmer because there are no structures to do so. They are also illiterate. They cannot discuss issues that affect their children since the children don't have a means of discussing their concerns with their parents.

You find many children who literally just grow up on the farm and end up working there. Maybe the parents cannot talk to the farmer, maybe there is no school on the farm, or even a clinic nearby. They cannot tell the government to provide a school or a clinic. It is very difficult to blame the parents for not looking after their children properly.

SCF: Before we continue, can you tell me if you have come across any beating or child abuse on the farms?

PO: It happens. I remember once talking to a child who told me that the beerhalls on the farms should be closed, because parents spend so much money on beer, but when children ask for money for a pen or an exercise book, the parents say they don't have it. There have also been reports of fathers raping younger girls, and a lot of children have been stopped from going to school, just because the father has married another woman. So there is a lot of child abuse, although probably most of is not reported.

I know that some farmers have actually employed a sort of a church person to provide moral or spiritual support. And now the FADCOs help the farmer to communicate with his workers and issues can be discussed. But otherwise it is a sort of individualistic situation where everyone is free to do whatever each one wants to do.

SCF: Before we go further, can we talk a bit about culture. It is said that some people in the farm communities are from Malawi, Zambia or Mozambique, and retain their culture in terms of song, dance, maybe folk-tales, and possibly polygamy, and that this is sometimes seen as a strength. On the other hand having little or no access to television or radio or outsiders coming in, the farmworkers have limited access to new ideas. What, in your view, are the strong points about them retaining their cultural identity and what are the weaker points?

PO: Maybe I can comment on the Malawians. Many of them still practise chinamwari, *an initiation ceremony for boys and girls who are approaching adulthood. It is very difficult to know what they are actually taught, because it is a sensitive issue. There are dances like the* nyawo *or* gure *where the people wear masks. Often they are not very welcome within the whole community because if girls and boys talk about the practise, they might get beaten up by the dancers.*

It is very difficult to go any deeper. The adolescents involved tend to be extremely sensitive and it is very difficult to get anything out of them. We have sometimes attended those dances and we don't see anything wrong, superficially at least. But the community themselves understand the depth of the belief in witchcraft and the superstitions, which they do not see as superstition, and they are afraid. On the other hand, I am sure these dances and initiation ceremonies have actually held people, from say Malawi or Mozambique, together. They share their cultural practices and they maintain them from to generation to generation. Nowadays people from other traditions like the Shona are now joining in. They too are now sending their children for the initiation ceremony.

SCF: Do you regard this as positive or negative? If you were discussing these dances and these practices with the children and you had the possibility of being entirely open, what would you advise them?

PO: I wouldn't stop them. The dances are a form of recreation, and there is not much else. I don't see anything wrong except possibly in the superstitious beliefs about which we know nothing. And I think the initiation ceremony is positive because they are taught about adulthood. Long ago we used to have our aunts and uncles teaching us about life and marriage. However, if only we knew what they were actually taught, we could introduce some more positive contemporary issues. On the negative side, some girls who have been through these rites are considered grown-ups, but they are very, very young. In terms of the law they are very young girls. But the men target them and they end up getting married.

SCF: At what age does a child become an adult in the farm?

PO: That's a difficult one. The definition varies. Some girls get married when they are twelve or thirteen, they have children, so automatically they are considered adults, but they are not. And the boys – some marry at eighteen years and automatically become adults, but actually they are not.

SCF: What effect do you see education having?

PO: Children go up to grade seven and then they have nowhere to go. There are no secondary schools on the commercial farms and those nearby are too expensive. But I think if there were proper communication between the farmers and workers, a way could be found for the farmer to assist the children in going to secondary school. Also there is need for more dialogue with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture so that they look into the issue of putting more schools in the commercial farming areas.

SCF: Another educational issue that has been raised is that of language because for many children their first language is not Shona, and yet Shona is the teaching language in primary schools. Does this disadvantage them or do they learn it very quickly?

PO: I think they are learning to speak Shona on the farms on a daily basis. We have a lot of Shona people working on the farms now, so there is a mixed language. I wouldn't say that the children are disadvantaged.

SCF: What about homework? If the parents are illiterate, it means that the child has no support at home. Is there anything that can be done about this?

PO: This is a big issue. Besides illiteracy, the families have very small houses and very little or no lighting, so the children find it very difficult to study at home although they might want to. Probably the FADCOs and the farmers can agree to provide a multi-purpose lighted shelter where the children can study in the evening.

SCF: And nutrition – we have heard that children often come to school hungry and are unable to concentrate. What is the daily diet of a farmworker's child?

PO: Mainly sadza and vegetables or kapenta. On some farms they rarely eat meat accept at the end of the month when they get their wages. Some farmers provide rations – mealie-meal and a packet of beans or kapenta. Sometimes rations are used as an incentive, given say for working the whole month without missing a single day.

SCF: What happens if someone is ill?

PO: They first approach the farm health worker who is permanently employed on the farm to teach preventative health care. She can refer a sick person to a hospital. Generally the farmer provides transport.

SCF: I understand that there is quite a lot of HIV and AIDS on the farms. Can you tell me a little more about this?

PO: I do not know the number of people affected, but over the last few years there has been a lot of awareness creation on the farms. And I know the CFU is still involved in training health educators. However the epidemic has already created a lot of orphans, often meaning the death of the mother rather than the death of both parents.

SCF: Do you think that in discussions with children, one should look at the question of death? How do children cope with death? Does it have a major impact in their emotional lives?

PO: It all depends on the traditional practices of the people on that particular farm. Some religions and customs allow children to funerals others don't. But it does have an effect. And many of the children do most of the household chores, so besides having lost a sister or a brother, they have more household duties. Sometimes girls are stopped from going to school to look after a sibling, or a child at the pre-school is looking after a younger sibling at the pre-school.

SCF: Briefly, what are the household chores for which children are responsible?

PO: Children fetch water and firewood, wash the dishes, wash the clothes and clean the house: but looking after siblings is a major task.

SCF: Are most of these chores undertaken by the girl child? You were saying that the girl is more disadvantaged than the boy child?

PO: Yes, she is more disadvantaged. If she goes to school, she wakes up early and does all the household chores before she leaves. And with homework, the girl child has to do the chores first. And when it comes to accommodation the girl is told to sleep in the kitchen because she is the one who has to see that the dishes are washed and everything is cleaned in the kitchen, so she ends up sleeping there. Whereas the boy may spend most of his time playing. And when it comes to the issue of large families, mostly it is the girl child who is stopped from going to school. Families prefer to send the boy. They say the girl is going to get married, so she doesn't have anything to worry about.

SCF: What about family planning. I know family life education is rarely taught in schools?

PO: The Family Planning Council (ZNFPC) nurses carry contraceptives with them during their immunization rounds. They have trained some farm health workers to be community based distributors within the neighbouring two or three farms. But often the women face difficulties in convincing their husbands to agree to family planning. Now I think the ZNFPC are carrying out an awareness campaign for men so that they can understand the issues, but it is still in its early stages and whether they will be able to cover all the commercial farms I am not sure.

SCF: Can we just look at the issue of gender again in terms of the male role model? Do you think that the less dignity a man has in terms of his work, the more likely he is to be very authoritarian when it comes to his wife and children?

PO: Normally when a man is poor it is very difficult for him to find a woman who is better than him in terms of marriage. It is also very difficult for a very poor man to stand up to his employer or even communicate with him. Maybe through frustration some men end up hitting out. You cannot provide enough for your family: you have a wife who is complaining, children who are complaining – they want this from you, they want that from you. You might end up becoming violent.

SCF: You have mentioned that the girl child usually sleeps in the kitchen. Can you tell me a little bit more about housing situation and its relationship to children?

PO: There are three categories of housing. Very poor housing where the workers just put up pole and dagga houses, but because they are not given enough time, or are not skilled enough to build good houses, they build very small huts that are not ventilated. This can spread disease such a TB and pneumonia as well as give rise to asthma. The figures for these ailments are very high on commercial farms. The other category is some form of a brick house but with very little ventilation and light. And sometimes what little ventilation there is, is blocked up to keep out mosquitoes and witches.

But where there is only a small brick house and a kitchen, large families will add another hut outside to act as a bedroom for the boys; the girls put up in the kitchen; the parents in the small brick house.

Sanitation is also lacking. Not every household in the commercial farms has a toilet, so a lot of the people still use the bush. And at times the farmers might want to construct a house. What all this boils down to is the health: not only of the adults, but also of the children; because without sanitation diseases spread.

The third category is decent accommodation where the farmworkers can feel they are at home. They may even plant trees and grow flowers outside. Farmers who are constructing houses now, may construct maybe four or five houses per year.

Housing depends a lot on whether there is communication between the workers and the farmer. Sometimes you find the workers understand why the farmer is not putting up good housing, because there is good regular communication between them and they understand the problems. At other times, when there is no communication, there is a lot of suspicion. You find that most farmers are very willing to provide for children, but if there isn't any real communication between the parents and the farmer, then parents don't understand what the farmer is doing for their children. It all depends on the dialogue between the parents and the farmers.

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SCF: This brings us to the FADCOs, can you tell me more about them?

PO: The farm development committee is established after having an awareness session with the workers. It is intended to act as a forum for discussion on developmental issues, look at solutions, plan projects and allocate responsibilities. It is meant to benefit both the workers and the farmer. The FADCO is composed of the farmer or his wife or the farm manager, as a permanent member, the farm health worker, the adult literacy tutor and a representative of the women in the farm village. The people have to elect a chairperson, the vice-chairperson, the secretary and vice and probably the treasurer.

So they have to sit down, maybe once every month, as a core group and discuss issues. They should also call for a meeting with the whole community once in three months and also have an AGM at the end of every year to review the progress on the farm.

SCF: Have the FADCOs worked much better than the workers' committees?

PO: Yes. One advantage is that the farmer is involved as a member, whereas he wasn't involved on the worker's commitee. So things were discussed behind his back. The workers' committee only discussed issues that were work related. They did not discuss other social issues. Also the workers' committees were sort of politically motivated and most of their issues – well, if the farmer said 'No' to their demand or request, it was turned into a political issue. The FADCOs are meant to benefit the farm as a whole, the worker, his family, the environment and the farm.

SCF: Can we now think about a child who has been educated, lets say up to standard seven and if he is one of say eight children, what is going to happen to them in terms of employment? The farmer won't be able to employ them all. After all even university graduates are having difficulty finding jobs.

PO: I think there is a future for them if they get the appropriate training regardless of whether they have gone to secondary school or not. And if they are given some vocational training in terms of what skilled labour is needed on the farms, the opportunities will be there, provided the children are properly trained. What is needed is to motivate them to become farmers or work in agriculture, because they live on a farm, and have seen what farming is like. However it would require a lot of motivation for them to start admiring farm life and farm work.

Land is available and I don't see us remaining with such large farms in the next hundred years or so. The size of farms will have to be reduced to accommodate other people coming in as farmers. And I think we have to plan accordingly. There are facilities. There are dams and dam sites on the commercial farms. More dams can be constructed and used in a sustainable way. But it is a question of planning for a future generation and finding the funding. There is nowhere the children on the farms can go, since they were born on the farms, they grew up on the farms and if their parents came from say Malawi or Mozambique a long long time ago, they cannot find their way back. This is home for them.

SCF: I enjoy your optimism, but I am not sure of it. Maybe there needs to be an industrial base on the farm, whereby a group of farmers can set aside some land with a workshop where people can become carpenters or metal workers or become mechanics. Then people could sell their skills because we can't all be agriculturists.

PO: Yes, we would need to develop an agro-industry and maybe whatever produce is grown on the farm can be processed nearby, maybe at a growth point, and create employment in this way. We actually invited two FADCO members to speak at a conference in Harare. They aired their views very clearly. Some workers want to remain on the farms, but others want to be resettled. So I think the authorities have to learn from them. The FADCOs provide a forum where they can air their views.

SCF: How aware do you think the children are of their situation?

PO: The children are very aware of what is affecting them. But they don't get the chance to air their views, there is no forum for them, and nobody has actually gone to ask them.

SCF: And if you were to go out and interview children, what would be the six key questions you would ask them?

PO: I would like to know how they live and how they feel their lives can be improved. What day-to-day problems affect them most, and what they see as solutions to those problems?

SCF: One of the things which concerns me is that we can all dream: we can all say, I need this, or if I had that I could do this. The question is how to stimulate awareness so that people, even in the poorest of situations, acquire a sense of control over their own lives. What will help children, as a group, to make decisions at a young age that will affect their futures.

PO: You have to stimulate greater awareness among parents. If parents remain unaware of the options, the children will not have choices.

Conclusion and Recommendations

One of the major principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the right of every child to an education. Article 28 states, 'The child has a right to education, and the States' duty is to ensure that primary education is free and compulsory'. Yet in many countries this principle of universal access is not fully adhered to. Children with disabilities, children from poor families, working children, those living outside parental care, children in institutions, children of migrant workers and refugees, and children of ethnic minorities are often denied access to school systems and are thus deprived of one of their fundamental rights.

Despite Zimbabwe's laudable efforts at providing free primary education for all in the post-independence period, our research has shown that children of commercial farmworkers have been marginalized from developments in this sector. Quite simply commercial farming areas need more schools, more teachers, more equipment and more books, and there is little merit in providing one without the others. Yet in the present economic environment, to expect the government to respond to these needs would be unrealistic. What is required is much more of a partnership between the government, the farm owners, the farmworker communities and the private sector if the problem of inadequate facilities is to be rectified.

In recent years, it has also become increasingly clear to many commercial farmers, that an educated workforce is a more professional and productive one. School construction, therefore, should not be seen as a financial burden but an investment which will bring rewards in the future. Financial institutions that seem more than willing to offer credit for improvements in agricultural productivity, should similarly be open to recognizing that social service provision, such as schools and clinics, is an investment in the workforce that may result in just as significant financial returns. Given the strategic importance of commercial agriculture in Zimbabwe's economy, continuing neglect of basis services makes little sense.

At the same time there needs to be some flexibility on the issue of minimum standards of school building. If these are too rigid, and schools will not be officially registered unless they have the requisite facilities, there is a danger that this will act as a disincentive to construction. Minimum standards in school facilities is a laudable objective to which the education system should aspire. But this needs to be tempered by an element of realism and an acknowledgement of what is realistically possible in any given situation. Recent moves by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture to accommodate such constraints and not withhold registration on the above grounds is therefore welcome.

A similar issue arises in relation to staffing. The research has shown that many qualified teachers regard their tenure on farm schools as an inconvenience. This observation is not meant to pass a universal judgment on all qualified

staff, some of whom display a commendable commitment to their establishments. But given the fact that commercial farming areas offer an unattractive prospect for many qualified teachers, due to poor infrastructure, inadequate facilities, lack of accommodation, no electricity etc, it is likely that many farm schools will continue to depend on unqualified personnel for some time.

Unqualified teachers, however, should be regarded as a resource to be utilized rather than a problem to be replaced. Many of them come from similar communities to the farm communities. Perhaps this explains the level of enthusiasm and commitment such teachers show in their work, a feature that several headmasters, farm owners, parents and children commented on during the research. What is required is a programme of in-service training so that their teaching skills can be improved, something which the teachers themselves would welcome.

At the same time, a longer term strategy of recruitment and training of teachers from communities of origin, such as the commercial farms, might go some way in reducing some of the complaints made by children and their parents. They indicated that teachers from outside their community were often dismissive towards them. Some teachers showed little interest in their culture. They did not understand their constraints in terms of housing, income, water and sanitation, clothing etc. that might negatively affect children's performance and appearance in school. Within this context, another factor is language as many children speak a dialect of a mixture of Shona and another language such as Chichewa. Sometimes this gives rise to communication problems and learning difficulties which deserve attention rather than punishment.

There is always the possibility of course, that once a teacher from the commercial farms becomes qualified they will have similar aspirations to town life and will not be interested in remaining in the community from which they have come. This is why efforts also need to be made at improving the living and working conditions for teachers on farms, so that there are some positive incentives that accompany a posting to these areas.

As the research has corroborated, and as the CRC reminds us, the state's obligation to children's education extends beyond issues of access, to issues of quality and relevance. Indeed these are linked. Children's willingness to attend school and parental support for education in terms of payment of fees, purchase of uniforms and books, provision of a conducive environment for homework, etc. will often depend on whether education is perceived by the community as delivering something useful to their children. Schools, therefore, not only need to enable their pupils to become literate and numerate but to provide them with skills to meet the challenges that they will face in the future.

Enhancing the ability of children to negotiate their way through the world around them, however, requires a shift in the education system. It needs to move away from an emphasis on formal, academic and abstract schooling to one that more adequately reflects the environment and situation in which children find themselves.

Despite the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS on farms and the high incidence of health problems due to inadequate sanitation, poor hygiene and poor nutrition, etc. the low priority accorded to the provision of education in such areas is disturbing. At the same time, while we would advocate that schooling should broaden the horizons and aspirations of the children who attend them, the low priority given to agricultural training on farm schools is also worrying.

Land redistribution is 'just around the corner', claimed one of the workers interviewed for this publication. Yet if young people possess few practical skills in agriculture and do not have a grasp of the technologies and methodologies that would enhance productivity, there is a danger that they will not be able to participate adequately or productively in any land reform programme. This is not to claim that children on farms should be deprived of an education that would enable them to pursue other careers. But the current curricula is inadequate and often inappropriate in terms of the employment market, which is developing at less than three per cent a year. This situation requires school-leavers to be resourceful and equipped with skills that can lead to apprenticeship in an

artisanal skill or enable them to become self-employed. This is, of course, not only true of children on farms but of all children that leave school with less than eleven years of schooling.

One way in which some of the above issues can be tackled is to strengthen the involvement of the community in schools, to something more than the occasional fundraising exercise that currently takes place. The farm community has a wealth of experience and knowledge that schools should call upon, with builders, carpenters, mechanics, farm managers, accountants, health workers, craft producers, etc. who can all contribute something useful to the children's education. Yet it is rare to find any school that can take advantage of such an input. Similarly the culture and traditions of the farm communities are never discussed or explored in an meaningful sociological or historical way.

And if one of the major complaints of teachers is that parents on farm schools do not support education of their children, then parents remind us that this is partly due to the fact that they are rarely encouraged to play a significant role in school affairs or given information on how they can best support their children in their educational endeavours. Teachers and headsters, claimed one parent, often seem unapproachable and distant, especially if they are qualified and come from outside the farms. This can be intimidating for adults in a community that has been deprived of education for several generations, and whose usual contact with school staff is when they are summoned because of late payment of fees.

Finally it needs to be restated that there are no easy answers to the provision of a useful, qualitative and accessible education for children in poorer communities. The problems are complex and as the research has shown, conditions vary from one location to the next. Some farm owners are supportive, others are not. Some communities are enthusiastic about schooling. Others are indifferent. The motivation of teachers and headmasters also varies, as does the commitment of children. But the complexity of the issues involved should not divert us from making the attempt at improvement. There are now some excellent, well resourced farm schools with good teachers. Is it not possible that these schools can be used as models and as institutions where more flexible, appropriate and open-ended curricula can be developed? Children on farms will be condemned to the same marginalization as their parents if they continue to remain deprived of the kind of education that will enable them to make a change in their lives. We believe that this publication has helped to give them a voice in showing us how this might happen.

Appendix 1

PRA Methodology

Participatory Rural Appraisal method was used with 2 000 children of all ages, and 1,072 children between twelve and sixteen years of age participated in discussions and exercises. The objective was to determine what kind of education, if any, was open to farmworkers' children, what their attitude was to education, and what difficulties they faced.

The process was initiated with a period of trust building composed of games, puzzles, songs and dances, which attracted large numbers of children. On arrival at the farm, the facilitators set out to gain the trust of the children, by joining them wherever they were already at play. Later some children said, they were attracted to the games when they saw how much the facilitators enjoyed them. In all cases this initial stage was much enjoyed by the children, making them eager to continue.

Following the games the purpose of the visit and their role in the study was explained to the children. Some ground rules were also formulated by the facilitators and the children. These rules covered issues such as:

- not laughing and making fun of statements made by a child
- not fighting
- allowing a child to determine the period of participation and the freedom to contribute without interruption.

The children eagerly policed their own rules once the data collection commenced.

As there were initially large numbers of children, they were divided up into three or four smaller groups to do a village mapping exercise. (Village mapping refers to the process of drawing a picture of the village, with all its component parts, such as the houses, water points, school, store, from the perception of the participants.) Each participant was encouraged to add something to the picture.

Children under ten years old were eager to collect material such as stones, sticks and leaves, for the older children to use to build their map on the ground. On most farms, once this had been done the children were asked to transfer the map onto a flipchart, which the older boys were very eager to do. On two farms, however, the children found it extremely difficult to construct their village on the ground, but were able to draw them on newsprint. (Interestingly enough these children had ease of access to school.) Once the maps were completed they were shown to the other children for comments or additions. This the children enjoyed very much.

Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were held with small groups of twelve to sixteen year olds. Topics such as, 'A day in the life of a child', and 'What I like most/least about school' were introduced. The children were then shown how to depict their daily activities on paper,

A day in the life of the child

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preparing what is termed a 'mobility map'. As the discussions had revealed a considerable difference between the daily lives of the girls and boys, the mobility maps were done in single sex groups. This was followed, by the groups being asked to draw a picture showing either something they liked or disliked about school. These drawings are termed picture 'codes'.

The first topic raised issues such as domestic violence, early marriages and child labour, while the second topic tended to focus on the difficulties associated with going to school. The issues highlighted in the FGDs then became the focus of the second round of discussions. Domestic violence, however, was found to be a very sensitive issue, and although individual conversations with adult facilitators elicited some information, it was not raised by the youth facilitators in subsequent discussions. Other issues found to be sensitive were polygamy, witchcraft, initiation rites, certain cultural dances, early marriages, and orphanhood. While the latter two issues were dealt with more successfully by the youth facilitators, the former group of issues were more easily discussed with the adult facilitators.

The participation of girls and boys in the discussions was found to be almost equal on most farms, with issues such as gambling and early marriages provoking a lot of arguments between the two. In general the boys tended to dominate the drawing activities, automatically taking the pen, while girls had to be encouraged to assume this role. The girls on the other hand expressed a liking for the discussions, while the boys had to be encouraged to participate actively. Even young married girls, with their babies strapped to their backs, enjoyed being actively involved. Activities such as village or mobility mapping, picture and drama the children found easy to do. Later, however, when some ranking exercises were introduced where the children were asked to prioritize issues, first in discussions and then in drawing form, using a spider diagram, they found it much harder to grasp the concepts. It required more than one session with the facilitators before they were able to try on their own. A wheel drawing is shown below.

It was discovered that the children became restless if the session was too long, and they would just leave the activity and start their own game. Accordingly the researchers learnt to break the sessions with energizers such as traditional dances, singing and games which gave the children new energy. There were a few children who tried to disturb the activities by fighting or shouting. Encouraging them to become involved in individual activities such as drawing, however, or asking them to undertake something specific for a group, such

Wheel diagram – problems at school

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as transferring drawings from the ground to paper, served to resolve the difficulty. Some of the girls who were minding babies, found the group work was disturbed if the child cried and they often had to leave the group and return later. Older girls also had to leave the groups early to prepare food for their families. On all farms it was difficult to close the sessions. The PRA activities had stimulated the children and the younger ones had grown attached to the facilitators – so much so that on two farms they begged them not to go, and clung to them. One child said, 'This is a very happy day for us. No one has ever played like this with us before.' Another added, 'Nobody has ever asked what we thought before.'

Both statements, in themselves are indications of the deprivation which must be addressed in terms of education.

The older children became more interested in participating in the activities as the study progressed, and many older youth wanted to be trained to facilitate discussions. They exhibited a real desire to learn more about children's issues, and there was a very obvious growth in confidence among most of the youth facilitators. It became clear, that the trained facilitators had acquired leadership status in their peer groups and were viewed with interest and some respect by the older people in the community.

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Save the Children (UK)

Save the Children Fund (UK) was founded in 1919 by Eglantyne Jebb whose vision was to put children first, regardless of nationality, race or creed. In 1924 the Declaration of Children's Rights was adopted by the League of Nations. In 1989 it was enshrined in international law as the cornerstone of the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Over the past 75 years SCF (UK) has developed into a leading international children's charity. It relies for its income on donations and fundraising. It also receives contributions for particular projects from the UK government, the European Union and the UN. SCF (UK) is a part of the Save the Children Alliance, an association of independent national member organizations around the world.

Save the Children Fund (UK) aims:

- *to develop a programme of practical action to place children's rights, needs, interests and views at the centre of development across the world.*
- *to combat the damage caused by policies and actions which threaten their survival and development.*
- *to respond to the situation of children in emergencies in ways that put their immediate needs in the context of their longer term interests and development.*
- *to encourage recognition of children's active contribution to the ties and societies in which they live.*
- *to support families and communities in caring for and protecting children, and in arguing for this role to be backed by government and society through investment and legislative change.*
- *to work alongside policy makers, practitioners and others to explore ways in which their decisions and actions can do more to realize children's rights and bring long-term benefits for children.*

SCF in Zimbabwe

SCF (UK) has been involved in developmental initiatives in Zimbabwe since Independence, working mainly with marginalized groups. With its particular concern for mother and child care, it supported the government's drive to restore health services to the communal areas, following their disruption by the war. Out of this grew a broad-based community health programme which continued through the 1980s.

SCF also began work in the Zambezi Valley, supporting mother and child care projects, pre-schools, womens' clubs, nutrition groups and income-generating projects. This experience encouraged them to work on the commercial farms with The Farm Health Worker Programme.

Current Activities

Child Rights is an integral component of their programming. SCF advocates at national, provincial, district and community levels for the principles of the CRC to be adhered to. Their HIV/AIDS programmes promote behavioural change among affected communities within the commercial farms and in the Zambezi Valley. Their outreach programmes work through Traditional Healers and Midwives, School Health Masters and various groups of peer educators targeting out-of-school youth, fishermen, commercial sex workers, and the community at large. SCF also facilitates home-based care for terminally ill and orphaned children.

In partnership with local Rural District Councils, SCF facilitates a Community Based Management of Water Programme in the Zambezi Valley, including the building of small/medium-scale dams and micro-irrigation schemes in response to periodic drought. More recently it has supported the establishment of a private company which has taken over the construction side of this programme.

The Zambezi Valley Community Development Programme aims to facilitate improved implementation of SCF programmes for children in the region. The Riskmap Programme can assess a community's vulnerability to household food security in the face of environmental hazards. The data is used to predict the proportion of households in a given area likely to face a food deficit, and to plan mitigatory strategies.

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WE LEARN WITH HOPE explores issues of educational access, quality and relevance for children of Zimbabwe's commercial farmworkers.

Both before and after independence this community of some two million people has remained marginalized in terms of service provision. As a result it has manifested some of the worst health, housing, sanitation, nutrition and social welfare statistics in the country.

Children's education has also suffered due to an inadequate number of schools, lack of resources and trained teachers, parental resistance and a curriculum which has often remained irrelevant to their needs.

This publication explores, largely through the voices of children, the issues that confront them in their search for basic, quality education and offers some practical suggestions as to how progress might be achieved.

WE LEARN WITH HOPE is aimed at a variety of audiences. For NGOs and government ministries involved with education, we hope the publication will help to place this neglected community on the national agenda. We also hope that the concerns expressed by children and parents around issues of quality and relevance in schools assume more of a profile in educational planning.

For organizations specially involved with children and the realization of child rights, we believe that the information on the history of the project will offer some guidelines as to how participatory research with children can be carried out.

Finally, we believe that the book will be of interest to a wider audience, interested in finding out about the lives of children in communities which are too often hidden from public attention.

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